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OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

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ASTEROIDS

THE BIG INTERVIEW

RICHARD GARRIOTT

LORD BRITISH ON CREATING GAMING'S MOST ENDURING RPG

WHY YOU MUST PLAY

POWER DRIFT

SEGA'S OVER-THE-TOP RACER GETS THE LOVE IT DESERVES

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

ANDROSS
STAR FOX'S CHIEF NEMESIS FINALLY TAKES CENTRE STAGE

GARY BRACEY
AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE PUBLIC FACE OF OCEAN SOFTWARE

STAR BLADE
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HOW TIGER ELECTRONICS FAILED TO BREAK INTO THE LUCRATIVE HANDHELD MARKET

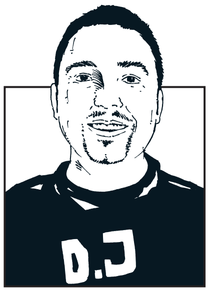
ISSUE 68 £4.99 NOWGamer.com

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LOAD 68

THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE OCEAN GAME?



DARRAN JONES

The stunning CPC conversion of *Chase HQ*. Many people don't know this, but it was actually better than the Speccy port.
Expertise:
Collecting every single PAL Dreamcast game ever
Currently playing:
Trials HD
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



STUART HUNT

It has to be *RoboCop* on the CPC. Great music, wonderful gameplay, it captures the feel of the movie and it's actually better than the arcade game.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Wolfenstein
Favourite game of all time:
Wolfenstein



JASON KELK

It has to be *Wizball* on the C64 – it's unusual, full of shooting and has a cat collecting paint. Got to love it.
Expertise:
What used to be called public-domain software
Currently playing:
Kernal's Chaos (C64)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL

My favourite title with the Ocean brand remains Sensible Software's *Wizball*. It's still a great take on the side-scrolling shooter genre, the sound is fantastic, and it's great fun.
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Doom Resurrection
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



RICHARD BURTON

I have to go for *Rainbow Islands* purely on the basis of the unadulterated arcade creamy gaming goodness the game oozes across all systems. Cutesy but good solid gameplay.
Expertise: Stuff, nonsense, things and stuff
Currently playing:
Motos
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



DAVID CROOKES

The isometric genius that was *Head Over Heels* was possibly Ocean's finest game. Stand up Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond. I salute you both.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Beneath A Steel Sky
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



PAUL DRURY

Daley Thompson's Decathlon for the button-bashing and the bushy moustache, though is the Speccy's colour clash really an excuse for making Daley white?
Expertise: Lurking
Currently playing:
Shadowfax
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



IAIN LEE

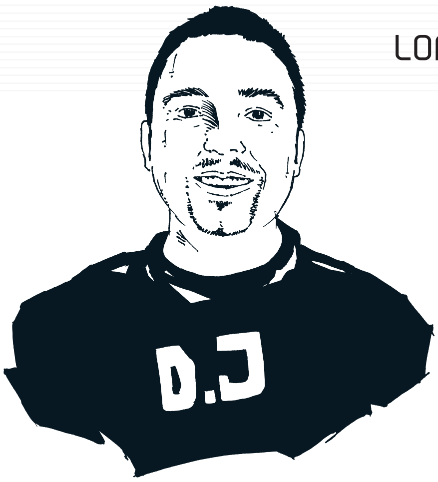
Daley Thompson's Decathlon. Button-bashing at its best.
Expertise:
Pretending to be American while playing on Xbox Live
Currently playing:
The original *WipEout*, as I got it a few weeks ago for £2 in Oxfam.
Favourite game of all time:
Elite (the BBC Model B version)



PAUL DAVIES

Hunchback, without a shadow of a doubt.
Expertise:
Banging my head against brick walls
Currently playing:
GI Joe
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N' Ghosts

LOADING...



Several months ago I discovered the large retro community on YouTube. Thanks to some forum members, I finally took the plunge and set up my own channel, which you can find at youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz. And do you know what? It's a lot of fun. You get a real buzz from sharing your love of games.

It's a rush that, for many, fulfils their love of being part of the retro community, but it's important to remember that, at the end of the day, it is just a hobby. Sadly, one fellow YouTuber found out just how addictive an obsession it could be, and I feel for him.

Lukemorse1 was a YouTube legend with thousands of subscribers and a love of gaming, and would do his best to personally reply to each and every request he received.

He paid the price when he posted a final video stating that his wife had left him and taken their son with her. It was a sobering message, with Luke pleading for others not to make the same mistakes. You could see the trouble brewing in certain videos, and I'm still undecided if people like myself contributed to his situation by badgering him with requests.

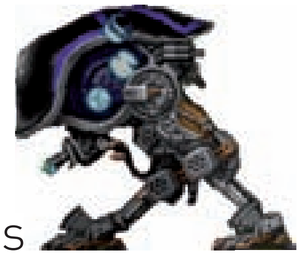
Ultimately, the retro community has lost a tremendous asset and a genuinely decent guy to boot. Luke, I hope it all works out for you, mate.

Enjoy the magazine.





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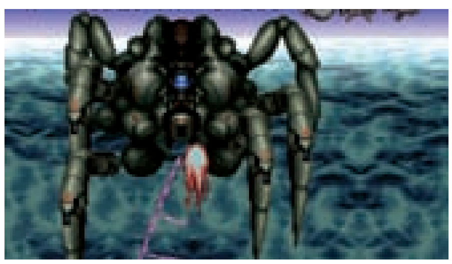
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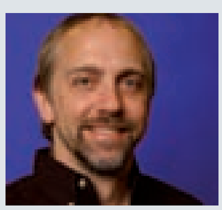
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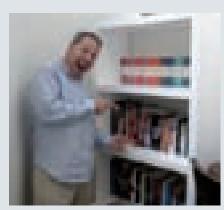
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Thanks to digital distribution, Team17 is experiencing a renaissance. Co-founder Martyn Brown explains how it's all happened



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He's known by his fans as Lord British and has even been into space, but for now Richard Garriott is just happy to discuss his long-running *Ultima* franchise



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He was instrumental in Ocean Software's success and a thoroughly nice chap, too. Meet the manager of one of the UK's most prolific publishers

> "The ultimate game to play when hammered" rolan

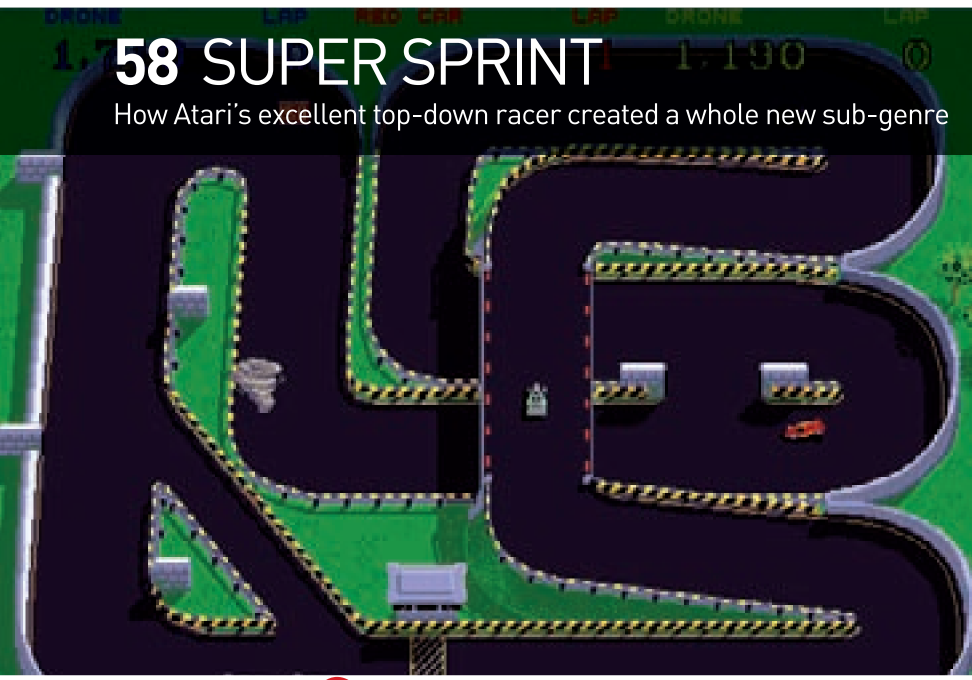


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How Atari's excellent top-down racer created a whole new sub-genre



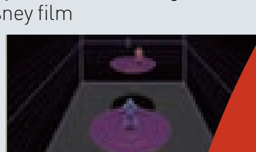
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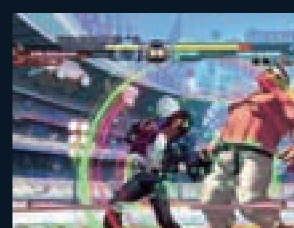




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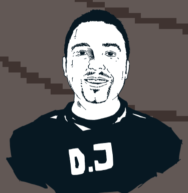
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retro radar

» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



» Love it or loathe it, there's no denying the huge number of retro games now appearing daily on Apple's iPhone. We speak to the people behind some of the most popular titles, catch up with Team 17's Martyn Brown and pimp our brand new YouTube channel. Enjoy.

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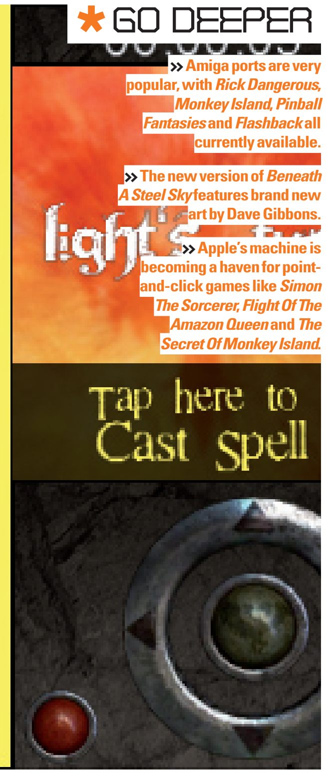
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Two whole pages of the latest retro memorabilia to gaze over

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The co-founder of Team17 stops by for a chat about the ever-changing industry



» [iPhone] A classic C64 hit revitalised for a new generation of gamers? Yes please!

✱ GO DEEPER



» **Amiga ports are very popular, with *Rick Dangerous*, *Monkey Island*, *Pinball Fantasies* and *Flashback* all currently available.**

» **The new version of *Beneath A Steel Sky* features brand new art by Dave Gibbons.**

» **Apple's machine is becoming a haven for point-and-click games like *Simon The Sorcerer*, *Flight Of The Amazon Queen* and *The Secret Of Monkey Island*.**

PORT IN A STORE

THE iPHONE PLATFORM REVITALISES RETRO GAMING ON THE GO

It's hard to believe that it's only been 12 months since Apple opened the iPhone App Store. Since then over 65,000 applications have been published to the online marketplace, a significant proportion of which are games. Its rise has been nothing short of meteoric, taking the world of mobile gaming by storm, and has touched every conceivable genre, including retro remakes.

As discussed in **RG** 67, digital distribution has seen a boost in the number of retro ports and remakes on modern systems, and the iPhone is no different. We've already seen chart-topping remakes of *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and *Worms*, as well as faithful reproductions of *Myst*, *Space Ace*, *Pinball Dreams* and *Simon The Sorcerer*. Namco Bandai has also set up a dedicated 'Apple Games' division headed by Jonathan Kromrey to bring its franchises to the platform, including *Pac-Man* and *Dig Dug*.

Point-and-click classic *Beneath A Steel Sky* is also making a comeback, which, as managing director Charlies Cecil explains, has been made possible only through the iPhone platform: "We chose the iPhone because it's an emerging and buoyant platform and the ease of distribution meant we could get away with not having a publisher," he told **RG**'s David Crookes. "The iPhone allows for a low price point and it was a chance to try digital distribution in a new market for us."

> **"The iPhone has taken mobile gaming by storm and touched every genre"**

It's these reasons that the platform is so successful. There is little barrier for entry when it comes to development, throwing size restrictions and quality regulation out of the window, meaning as long as a game doesn't offend, crash or violate copyright, it's almost guaranteed to go on sale. It also has a clear-cut profit scheme that few other services can compete with, where developers receive a handsome 70 per cent cut. Analysts predict that it will make Apple a billion dollars a year from its 30 per cent take, so it's no wonder everyone's jumping on board.

Another key factor, as the developers we've talked to have pointed out, is the unique demographic. While the majority of handhelds and systems are tailored toward a younger audience, iPhones and iPod Touches are largely in the

Developer's opinions

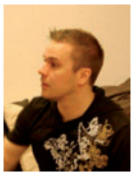
» Insider thought on the digital interest in classic games



Yinon Yamin and Liron Barzilay

Owners of iPhSoft (*Flight Of The Amazon Queen, Simon The Sorcerer*)

"We love classic games, especially point-and-click adventures, and playing them on the move brings back many good memories. The basic porting of this game was not very hard; we used the amazing ScummVM project and improved it. Instead of making the game from scratch, we only had to update the existing source, ensuring good performance with OpenGL. We modified the controls to fit the game. There is no mouse, of course, so we upgraded the controls to support touch screens. The age of many iPhone users is between 25 and 35, and a big part of them played classic games, making them great customers."



Juuso Salmijärvi

Owner and project co-ordinator of Rodeo Cowboy (*Pinball Dreams, Pinball Fantasies*)

"We ported *Pinball Dreams* and *Fantasies* because we felt it suited them almost perfectly: screen size, touch controls and the fact that a sizeable number of iPhone users have played the original trilogy. The games are also really easy to pick up, learn and enjoy – a must for a mobile game.

"We didn't tailor the games very much at all – they are near-perfect the way they are. Even the controls worked basically right out of the box, as the touch screen is very good and responsive.

"Retro games are making a comeback because when resources were limited you had to hone [them] to perfection. This is what makes a game great."

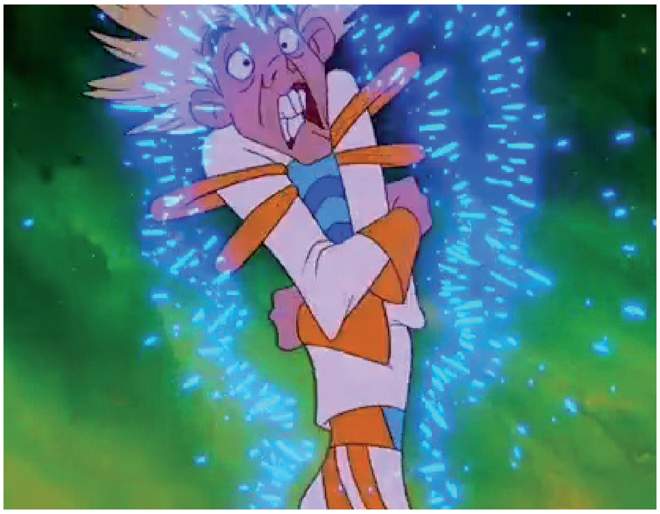


Martyn Brown

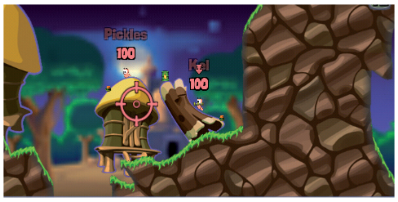
Studio director of Team17 (*Worms*)

"Although we feel *Worms* has remained pretty current, we've always tried to remake the game for any new platform it hits. I think the casual nature and demographic of the iPhone suits retro game ideas and a more simplistic, quicker experience, although that wasn't especially our aim with *Worms*.

"The only real difficulties were in the interface, given it's a touch-screen device, and deciding how the controls should be mapped to the game. I've played a few retro games on the device and, personally speaking, I find the lack of tactile controls means that maybe not all retro experiences are really done justice. That said, there are some great titles for the device."



» [iPhone] The best version of *Space Ace* we've played outside the arcades. Seriously.



» [iPhone] The iPhone version of *Worms* might slightly disappoint when it comes to controls, but it's faithful and technically capable.



hands of older and more affluent users who can afford them. As a result, it's a market more receptive to retro games and one that can afford to pay higher prices for them. Although the sweet spot with iPhone games lingers at the $1 mark, established brands and remakes go for slightly higher as they are more likely to sell on name recognition alone, compared to the hundreds of new properties that compete for digital shelf space.

Although iPhone development has become a lucrative business, does the platform actually suit retro gaming? Its portability goes hand-in-hand with the more simplistic and broken-up gameplay that older games offer, and the touch-screen interface works well with many titles, especially adventures. While these are a natural fit, titles that originally controlled with a mouse and keyboard or a joypad such as *Duke Nukem 3D* and Sega's Mega Drive ports add unsightly, cumbersome on-screen buttons, or awkward tilt control. Hardware manufacturers are set to experiment with gaming peripherals to clip on to the device, but they will end up making the device less mobile, nullifying one of its main selling points.

In terms of hardware, the iPhone has already proven to be a mobile powerhouse, offering full 3D gaming, and has proven to run *Sonic CD* on an emulator flawlessly, making almost anything pre-32-bit fair game. Despite its technical prowess, it's not without growing pains: Apple has been keen to update its hardware year-in year-out, with the iPhone adding 3G network support and faster processing over several generations. By splitting the user base with its hardware and firmware updates, which iPod Touch users must pay for, it's made even the simplest ports troublesome to run across multiple iterations, making usability and development problematic for a wide user base.

While the App Store has had a dream start, one that no one could have predicted, it's not without faults. On a business level, it's a marketplace viable for even the bedroom coder, allowing retro releases to be made on a shoestring budget, and it can offer them to a demographic like no other. Control and hardware issues blight its successes, but it's surely something that developers and Apple itself will be sure to iron out with time. The store shows no sign of slowing down, however, so who knows what long-forgotten classics will be with us in another year's time? *

THE RETRO DEBATE

» Do retro games work well on the iPhone?

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

CraigGrannell
Same as any system, it depends on the conversion. Some, like *Pinball Dreams*, are great; others, like *Sonic*, are borderline disasters. And then there are others that are major reworkings and updates, many of which are excellent.

Sokurah
I just ordered a 3GS yesterday and can't wait to try out games I've seen in the magazine.

woody.cool
I cannot stand touch screens, especially on a small handheld device such as the iPhone.

takesages
I don't like touch screens as a whole, but I guess it's all right for some games that can take specific advantage of the touch screen and portable nature of the thing. At least they are cheap, huh?

psj3809
Just not into a device without a joystick. Don't get me wrong, it's very clever and innovative, but for me I love a joystick/pad. Once the iPhone has some sort of 'gadget' it locks into for gaming controls I would be a big fan.

Bub&Bob
Slightly off-topic, but I got hold of a 4GB iPod Nano for a fiver – my first Apple product! It's got a sort of *Arkanoid* game on it, which, even using the wheel, is great fun, so it's made me want a Touch even more now. Gonna have to get the 32GB, though!

khisanth
I love playing retro releases on the iPhone, however ONLY if the control method works well. I bought *Galaga* but find it too frustrating to play with any of the three available control methods.

Darran
It's not suited to every type of game, but when done right, a good iPhone update can totally reinvigorate a classic game.

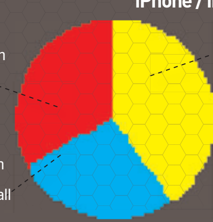
FORUM OPINION

Do you enjoy playing retro releases on the iPhone / iPod Touch?

Yes, they are well-suited to the system – **33%**

Depends. Some games do it better than others – **40%**

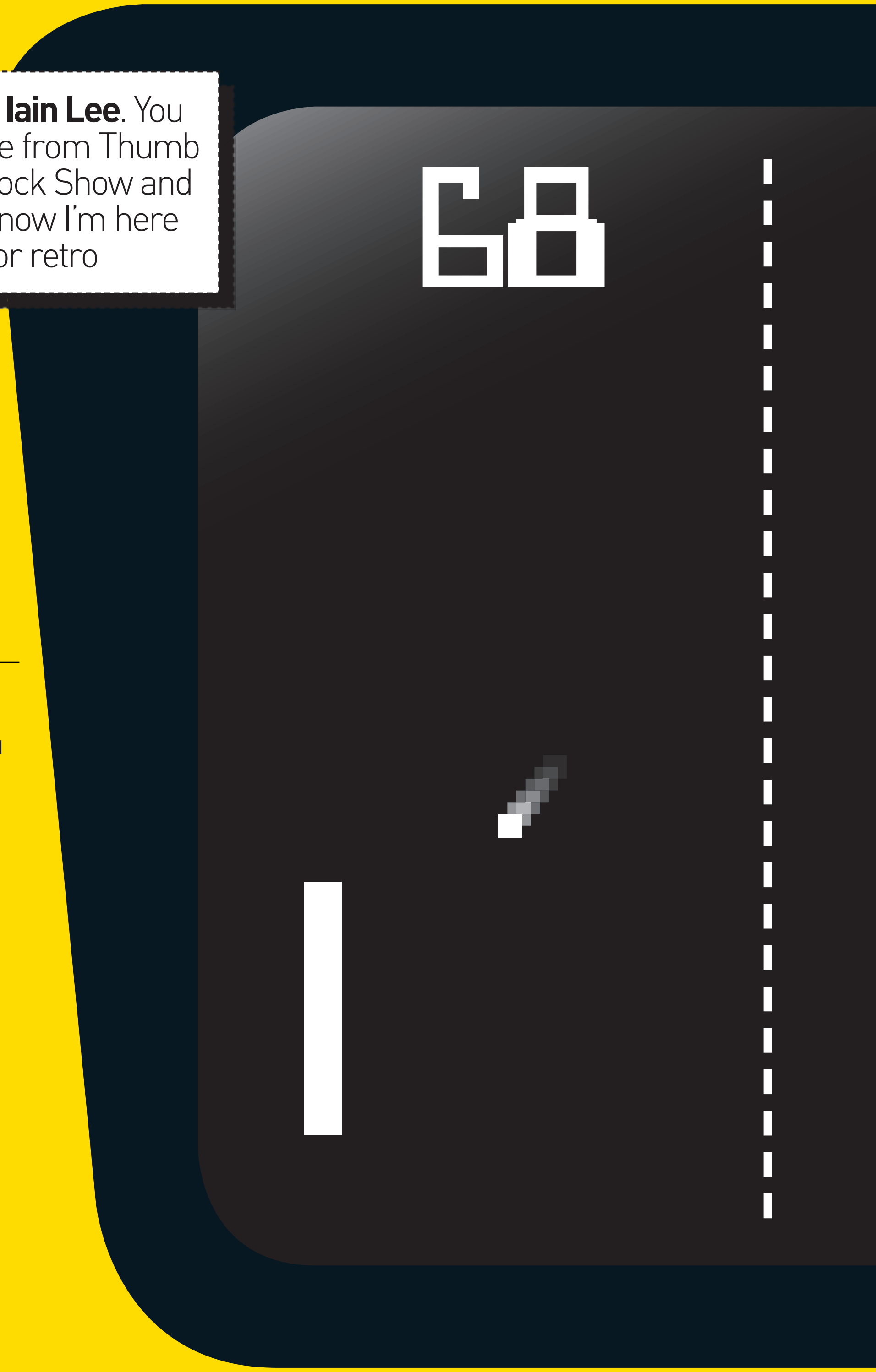
No, I don't get on with the touch screen at all – **27%**



Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting *The Sunday Night* show on Absolute Radio at 10pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro



The Man Behind Pong

I see Ed Logg is being celebrated in this issue, and rightly so. I was lucky enough to visit his house and play on his very own *Asteroids* machine (although I was disappointed it was a cab and not an actual tabletop – surely the ultimate gaming machine).

While he was a charming gentleman, he was a little short with me that day. Not through any fault of my own – I think I was on my best behaviour – but because he had hives. Now, hives is an American complaint that I've heard of many times, but I'm still not entirely sure what it is. Anyway, despite having this mythical American condition he was still very generous with his time, and for that I will always be grateful, even though he totally whipped my arse at the game. He's still got it.

Another chap I met on that pilgrimage to the States who was even lovelier and certainly didn't have any made-up illnesses, was the wonderful Al Alcorn. What a star. I spent the afternoon in his garage high up on a beautiful hillside in the leafy part of California. To me, this dude really is one of the most important men in gaming history.

It's hard to think of the world *BP* (before *Pong*) – in fact the game is a year older than me – and what an honour it was to play it on Al's very own cab. If you've never touched an original *Pong* machine, you're missing out. Everything about it has a classic Seventies design. The beautiful angles, the garish yellow colouring and the superb screen… it really is stunning. While I may not be a huge fan of the game itself – I can only stand a few minutes of it before getting a little bored – its historical importance cannot be overlooked. It's like the Magna Carta of videogames. I can't be arsed to read the whole thing, but I'm glad it exists.

Al was surprised that a film crew had flown out from London to visit his humble garage, but he certainly turned on the charm once we were there. He suddenly became a 12-year-old kid and turned to me with a twinkle in his eye and said: "The best thing about this machine is I know how to make it give me free games." Genius!

I was surprised when he opened the back and revealed its super-simplistic setup. It was virtually empty and looked like something from MFI, consisting of a coin tray, a board and a crappy black-and-white portable TV – the kind you get handed down when your older sister upgrades to a colour portable. If an eight-year-old PS3 fanboy saw that, it would be the equivalent of my grandad trying to explain the merits of a hoop and stick.

I spent the rest of the day driving around town while Al pointed out the old Atari offices, recalling their antics. I'm afraid to say, much of it is unprintable. Well, it was the Seventies and those were heady days.

Pong is like the Magna Carta of videogames. I can't be arsed to read it, but I'm glad it exists

Favourite person you've interviewed Dr Karl Kennedy from *Neighbours*. Come on, it's Karl Kennedy.



CLASSIC REVIEWER



BIO

Name:
Steve Merrett
First Magazine:
ST Action
Role:
Staff Writer
Favourite Game:
Impossible Mission
Favourite System:
SNES

Favourite game?
Tough to call just one, but *Impossible Mission* for C64 is up there, as are *World Games* and *Axelay*.

Favourite system?
Super NES, hands-down. Easily the greatest machine for innovative titles.

Best press trip you've been on?
Going to see *Earthworm Jim 2* at Shiny in California. A hotel room where you could walk on to the beach, and a day and a half spent working over the week-long visit.

Best mag you've worked on?
The obvious answer is *Mean Machines*, but to be honest I was on it in the arse-end of its lifespan. I'd say being involved with the launch of the *Official Nintendo Magazine*. It had most of the *Mean Machines* team on it, and had the best camaraderie of any mag I've worked on.

Mag you'd like to work on?
None really. Would like to have worked on *FourFourTwo* at some point and freelanced for them on occasion, but I don't feel the need to go through all those late nights and deadlines any more.

Best person you've met in the videogame industry?
Professionally, I still think Hideo Kojima is up there. Say, what you like about him, he manages to excite people and knows how to generate interest. Personally, I made loads of mates during my mag time, and still stay in touch with most of them now.

How have games magazines changed over the years?
The enthusiasm seems to have waned. The sheer excitement of seeing a big new release has diminished, and that comes across in the mags more these days. Cynicism is a lot more prevalent, too. It's fine to give a crap game a kicking, but many are presumed guilty before they have even been seen.



» [Mega Drive] EA Bright Light boss Harvey Elliott has expressed an interest in reviving some of Bullfrog's classic games for new audiences.

THE RETURN OF BULLFROG?

ELECTRONIC ARTS REVEALS ITS INTENTIONS TO REVITALISE PAST CLASSICS

Bullfrog fans may want to start sending petitions to the head of EA Bright Light, Harvey Elliott. In an interview with Kikizo.com he admitted his love for old Bullfrog games and mentioned he'd love to see them revived for the current generation.

"I love the old Bullfrog IP, it got me passionately into games, and I'm proud that Bullfrog is part of the heritage of Bright Light," he revealed. Elliott went on to profess his love for both *Theme Park* and *Populous* and stated how he'd like to see the games resurrected on current-gen systems.

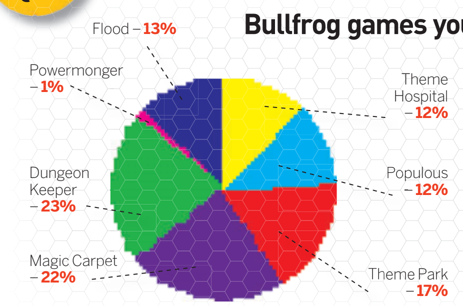
Despite his obvious esteem for the long gone studio – many employees of which are now at Bright Light – Elliott was quick to mention that while the principle of reviving past games is rather romantic, it's important that they're only brought back if they're adapted for today's market and not just rehashed as a simple remake.

He was also sure to point out that many of the old games in question, despite being very successful, only sold 100,000 to 200,000, well below the millions that some games now notch up. Still, despite his grim warning, we're convinced this could be the start of something special. The much-rumoured *Syndicate* game has finally been officially announced, and with companies like LucasArts now realising the importance of their back catalogues, other studios are no doubt following suit. We'd kill for a brand new *Magic Carpet*, but for the moment we're happy to place our faith in both Elliott and EA. *

FORUM OPINION

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Bullfrog games you would like revived?



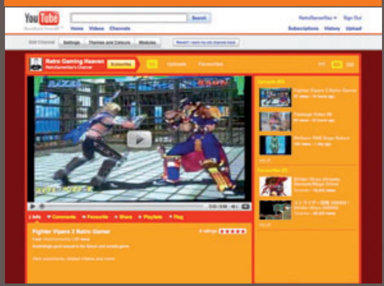
While *Populous* is probably my favourite of those, a shiny *Magic Carpet* would be awesome.
– Smurph

I vote for *Theme Hospital* as it didn't have a million variations of it after its release
– Joey

I would love to see a new *Dungeon Keeper* game, or at the very least an HD version of *DK2* on XBLA.
– Havantgottaclue

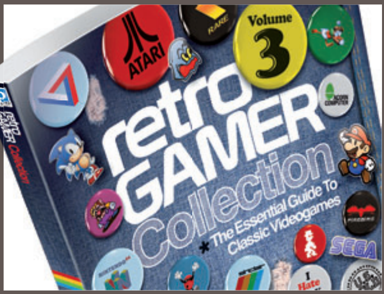
MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



Retro Gamer Does YouTube

We've been amazed by the number of retro enthusiasts on YouTube. And after enjoying videos by readers Lorfarius, XFile2078, Ianwilson1978 and interghost, Darran set up his own channel. Retro Gaming Heaven features everything from commentaries on the mag to videos of Darran's Dreamcast collection. Visit **http://www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz** and join in the fun.



The return of the RG bookazine

We're delighted to reveal that our latest bookazine is out now. Available from WHSmith, Borders or Barnes & Noble, or direct from our online shop, it's the perfect gift for anyone who loves retro gaming and is absolutely jam-packed with amazing articles. Yours to own for an astonishingly low £9.99, it's a tome no fan of retro should be without. Order it now from **www.imagineshop.co.uk**.



Star Wars goes VC

LucasArts has revealed that all three *Super Star Wars* games will be heading to the VC very soon. After last month's announcement of classic games like *The Secret Of Monkey Island, The Dig* and *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*, this is another great move from LucasArts. Let's just hope this means that digital downloads for classics like *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* will soon follow.

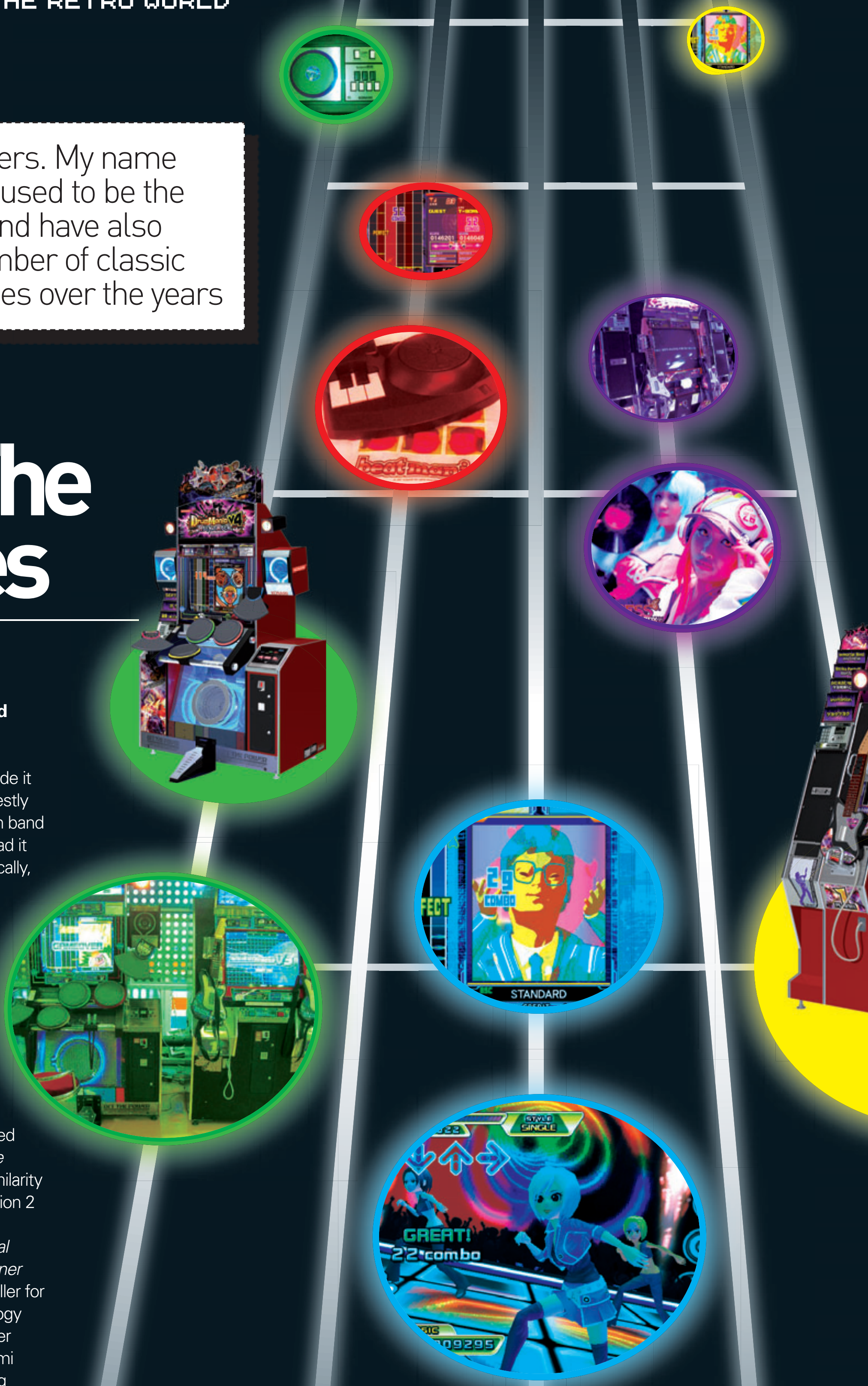
retro columns

» PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio...
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



Konami And The Original Heroes

With Rock Band, Guitar Hero and DJ Hero now household names, I can't help wondering what Konami makes of it all. After all, Konami invented the whole idea of playing plastic guitars, drums, keyboards and singing vocals to a conveyor-belt of prompts.

Last year, when Alex Rigopulos and Eran Egozy of Harmonix made it into the Time 100 thanks to *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*, I was honestly shocked. At least it was Steven Van Zandt of the Bruce Springsteen band singing their praises – older guys are allowed to be out of touch – had it been Herman Li of DragonForce I would have been mortified. Basically, my one thought at the time was, 'What about Konami?'

"*Rock Band* may just turn out to be up there with the rise of FM radio, CDs or MTV," said Van Zandt. "Taking a break from the wall-to-wall violence of most videogames can't hurt either." Do me a favour and Google search *GuitarFreaks* and *DrumMania*.

DJ Hero is basically *BeatMania*, the DJ game that Konami introduced first of all (before *GuitarFreaks*) that kick-started the entire Bemani craze back in December 1997. This remains such a fond memory of mine, attending the following year's Tokyo Game Show and seeing thousands of gamers descend upon the Konami booth to try out the PlayStation versions. In the game centres of Shibuya you had to queue for your turn. 1998 also ushered in another much-copied Konami innovation: the phenomenal *Dance Dance Revolution*. And here's another one: *SingStar*. Notice any similarity to Konami's *Karaoke Revolution*? Konami's game made its PlayStation 2 debut in 2002. Sony launched *SingStar* in 2004.

My favourite unsung Konami stroke of genius, however, is *Martial Beat*, a precursor to Nintendo's *Wii Fit*, Namco Bandai's *Family Trainer* and EA's *Sports Active*. Having introduced a motion-sensing controller for a game based on the Japanese Para Para dance craze, the technology was later adapted for martial-arts-based exercise routines on a rather intimidating coin-op machine, and then PlayStation 2. I guess Konami couldn't figure out how to create excitement for *Martial Beat* among gamers who were, at the time, happier playing *Gran Turismo 3*. The idea of games and exercise, apart from *DDR*, which was really just for fun, seemed bizarre – even for the more receptive Japanese gamers.

Anyway, I wholeheartedly hold Konami responsible for all the new-generation casual games we're enjoying today. No *DDR*, no *Wii Fit*. No *GuitarFreaks*, no *Guitar Hero*. No *DrumMania*, no *Rock Band*. No *BeatMania*, no *DJ Hero*. And I'm especially keen to see Konami recognised for those last three. Grrr.

My favourite unsung Konami stroke of genius is Martial Beat, precursor to Wii Fit

What's your favourite Dreamcast game? It has to be Sega's Samba De Amigo



MR BLOBBY

THE RETURN OF A BOY AND HIS BLOB

If you want to see a grown man turn into a gooey mess then watch Darran play *A Boy And His Blob*. By pressing up on the D-pad you're able to hug your amorphous friend. This instantly resulted in a drawn out 'awwww' from the boy Jones. Needless to say, the demo was ruined by constant hugs from the simpering 35-year-old man child.

Nevertheless, despite one or two control issues, Wayforward Technology's new game is shaping up to be something really rather special, and while we remain uncertain whether it will find its feet as a full-price release – this has 'WiiWare game' written all over it – Majesco is confident that a new generation of gamers will fall in love with Wayforward's stunning-looking update.

Looking extremely similar to *Braid* – no bad thing, in our book – gameplay will be instantly familiar to anyone who has played David Crane's original game. As with the NES classic, you use an assortment of different jelly beans to navigate the cleverly designed stages, and we've already seen the adorable-looking blob turn into holes, ladders and even a trampoline.

This does come at a price, however, because despite using the Nunchuk to activate the blob's powers, we sometimes found the controls slightly clunky to use, meaning that occasionally we died due to no fault of our own. There's still a little while before *A Boy And His Blob* is eventually released, so we're confident that Wayforward will be able to turn this around. After all, look how good *Contra 4* turned out. *



» [Wii] We've no idea what happened to the promising-looking DS version, but this is shaping up very nicely indeed. Sort the controls, though.

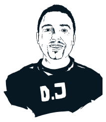






* WHAT WE THINK

Darran



This is quite possibly the cutest game I've ever seen. I didn't have that much of an issue with the controls, but they could definitely be tightened up. Still, the level design is clever and the blob himself is adorable. I can't wait.

Stuart



I have faith in *A Boy And His Blob*. Yes, there are slight control issues, but WayForward worked wonders with the *Contra* franchise, so I have every faith that David Crane's classic game will receive the love it deserves.

Ashley



This looked ace when I watched Darran playing it, but I found it frustrating in practice thanks to what I thought were over-complicated controls. If the developer can sort that out then *A Boy And His Blob* could be a really good puzzle game.



WHAT IF?

Your favourite next-gen games remade retro style

Subject No 5

Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X

UBISOFT'S *H.A.W.X* IS a nice take on the arcade flight sim and features amazingly realistic visuals and plenty of tough challenges, but how would it fare on the C64? The obvious answer would have been an *After Burner* clone, but no doubt still having horrific memories of the C64 conversion, our boy Trev has instead turned Ubisoft's blaster into a vertical shump. The only question now is how we can play it.





» [C64] Why would you want to emulate *After Burner*? The C64 port was rather pants.

Retro Booty

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO DEEP



The Legend Of Zelda – Sheik Statue

- **RRP:** £36.81
- **Manufacturer:** First4Figures
- **Buy it from:** www.playasia.com

First4Figures has made some truly astonishing looking models over the years, but this beautiful rendition of Sheik from *Ocarina Of Time* remains one of our favourites (after Skullkid and Link, that is). Officially licensed and nine inches in height, it's individually numbered and comes with its own authenticity card.

Blanca 12-Inch Model

- **RRP:** £119.99
- **Manufacturer:** Sota Toys
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

Yes, we show *Street Fighter* models practically every month, but you would, too, when they look this good. This 12-inch model of everyone's favourite jungle man is full of detail and is based on Blanca's *Street Fighter II* incarnation. Buy two and use them as expensive bookends.





Mad Catz Street Fighter IV Pad

- **RRP:** £34.99
- **Manufacturer:** Mad Catz
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

There's a huge resurgence of fighters at the moment for both PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 so why not pick up one of these excellent pads? Modelled on the glorious Saturn pad (still the best pad for fighters in our humble opinion) it comes in a variety of styles and makes pulling off Dragon Punches a cinch.

Sonic T-Shirt

- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Bravado
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

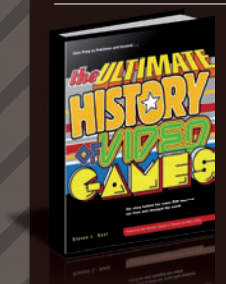
Another month, another Sonic T-shirt. We particularly like this one as it reminds us of the awesome Mega Drive title screen. Another nice touch is the worn look to the print image, furthering its retro appeal.



TREASURE OF THE MONTH

The Ultimate History Of Videogames

- **RRP:** £10.56
- **Publisher:** Prima Life
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



The *Ultimate History Of Videogames* has been available for many years now, but it's such an essential read we felt we should tell everyone about it. Author Steven Kent has collated over 500 interviews with industry legends such as Shigeru Miyamoto, Nolan Bushnell and Toru Iwatani and in doing so has created one of the most in-depth and concise reports of our industry. There are hundreds of juicy anecdotes to enjoy, and while the writing is a little dry at times, it's nevertheless full of fascinating information. A truly essential read that no fan of videogames should ever be without.

Street Fighter Blu-Ray

- **RRP:** 15.99
- **Manufacturer:** Fox Home Entertainment
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

Yay, it's tenuous link time. *Street Fighter* the movie will always have a special place in our hearts purely because it features some of the worst casting of all time. Nevertheless, it's also available on our viewing format of choice so we'll probably end up buying it yes again.





Supercade

- **RRP:** £24.65
- **Publisher:** MIT Press
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

Like *The Ultimate History Of Videogames*, V Burnham's *Supercade* has been around for a while now. And, like *The Ultimate History of Videogames,* it's also an essential book for your collection. Highlighting the golden period of 1971 to 1984, it features key developers and some stunning imagery. The ultimate coffee-table book.

Guardian Heroes Carry Case

- **RRP:** £14.99
- **Manufacturer:** Sega
- **Buy it from:** www.videogameimports.com

It's always nice when we discover an item that isn't branded with Mario and Sonic (not that we don't love those guys). Anyway, browsing through **videogameimports.com** we discovered this amazing-looking *Guardian Heroes* carry case. Look at that gorgeous art and lust after it.

Nintendo Mini Classics

- **RRP:** £9.99
- **Manufacturer:** Prezzybox
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

This collaboration between Nintendo and Prezzybox revitalises three classic Game & Watch titles in the form of miniature Game Boy keyrings. We've not played them all, but we did compare *Super Mario Bros* to Stuart's G&W original and the results are very favourable indeed.







Adventures Of Sonic The Hedgehog

- **RRP:** £34.99
- **Manufacturer:** Delta Home Entertainment
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

Some would argue that Sonic lost his charm as soon as he was able to talk, but he nevertheless has a solid fan base and has appeared in countless cartoons. The following eight-disc boxset contains a staggering 65 episodes of *Sonic* love, so check it out if you adore Sega's hog.



Street Fighter II T-Shirt

- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Bravado
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

After being bowled over by last month's cast T-shirt, Stuart's managed to track down some more excellent threads featuring the entire cast of Capcom's magnificent brawler.



Dreamcast Watch

- **RRP:** £249.99
- **Manufacturer:** Sega
- **Buy it from:** www.videogameimports.com

Darran almost exploded with excitement when he clapped eyes on this. It's an official Dreamcast watch that was released for the machine's launch. Lift up the lid and the watch face can be found underneath. Pricey, but absolutely gorgeous.



Shigeru Miyamoto: Nintendo Game Designer

- **RRP:** £17.08
- **Publisher:** Kidhaven Press
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

This is a rather disappointing book. It's less than 50 pages in length, is fairly low on juicy information, and gives you little real insight into Miyamoto's incredible success at Nintendo. So, why are you covering it? we hear you ask. Simple. It has one of the best covers we've ever seen on a book about videogames.



Kirby Gashapon Keychains

- **RRP:** £2.50
- **Manufacturer:** Nintendo
- **Buy it from:** www.playasia.com

These delightful models are available to buy directly from **playasia.com** and are absolutely adorable. Based on Kirby's recent DS game *Super Star Ultra*, they're delightful looking creations that you can squeeze if you're getting stressed out.

TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



01 Gauntlet
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



02 Pac-Man
- **RRP:** £11.95
- **Manufacturer:** Namco
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com



03 Shoryuken
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

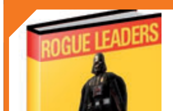


04 Street Fighter II
- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Bravado
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com



05 Atari ■ **RRP:** £27.50
- **Manufacturer:** Joystick Junkies
- **Buy it from:** www.joystickjunkies.com

TOP FIVE BOOKS



01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
- **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Porn & Pong
- **RRP:** £10.99
- **Publisher:** Feral House
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



03 Masters Of Doom
- **RRP:** £8.99
- **Publisher:** Random House Trade
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

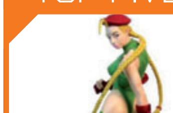


04 Racing The Beam
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Publisher:** MITPress
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

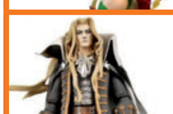


05 Dungeons & Desktops
- **RRP:** £29.50
- **Publisher:** AK Peters
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



01 Street Fighter 18-Inch Cammy Statue
- **RRP:** £229.99 ■ **Manufacturer:** Sideshow Collectibles ■ **Buy it from:** www.play.com



02 7-Inch Alucard Figure
- **RRP:** £12.99
- **Manufacturer:** NECA
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



03 NES Belt Buckle
- **RRP:** $30 (approx £16)
- **Manufacturer:** The NES Buckle
- **Buy it from:** www.nesbuckle.com



04 Sonic Costume
- **RRP:** £34.94
- **Manufacturer:** Heroes for Kids
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Space Invaders Clock
- **RRP:** $80
- **Manufacturer:** Taito
- **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com

* A MOMENT WITH... Martyn Brown

Every issue, we put an industry legend in the hot seat. This month we've been chatting to Team17 co-founder Martyn Brown



» Martyn feels lucky to have been involved with some of the industry's best-known titles. But, really, we're the lucky ones.

Who is Martyn Brown?

He co-founded Team17, a British developer that has been around for an impressive 19 years (22 if you count its time as 17-Bit Software). Team17 classic *Worms* is now available on iPhone

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?
As this is **Retro Gamer** I'd ask people to take a look at our new *Alien Breed* title that's about to hit XBLA. It's something we're calling 'retro modern' in its approach.

What is your proudest memory?
I'm lucky to have many, including first seeing *Full Contact* on the shelves in 1991, picking up various awards for the company, having the Most Played XBLA Game Of 2007 and the number one AppStore app – very lucky indeed. Proudest? When my first child was born, life is like that.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
Any number of third-party publishers. It's much easier and less complicated when we're doing our own thing.

Which industry veteran do you admire?
There are a few: Sid Meier for games I loved to play, but there's a whole load of Spectrum pioneers who totally got me hooked.

How would you like your games to be remembered?
Fun, entertaining, well considered. We're lucky to have a few good games in our almost 20-year history. We hope to deliver more, too, especially now we're fully independent again.

Which games do you wish you'd made?
That's a difficult question for me, but probably *Diablo II* or *Diablo III*.

What opportunities has making videogames given you?
1) Working with brilliant, talented and very amusing people – friends for life – not only at Team17, but also in all walks of the industry. 2) Travel, I get to go to great places. 3) Creative expression and entertaining others. 4) To be even luckier than I was already. 5) To work under my own terms.

What's your darkest industry memory?
Maybe five to six years ago when it was very difficult being an independent with no apparent future other than third-party publishing and work-for-hire. It's no way to operate as an indie, and it was the first time I saw myself getting out – I came very close.

And your best?
Actually it's in the last year or so. The industry has come full circle and once more we're independent, self-publishing, calling the shots, making our own mistakes and putting our money where our mouth is, without relying on sales and marketing departments. The opportunity that digital distribution brings has radically enthused Team17.

> **"Digital distribution has given a lifeline to independents"**



» [XBLA] *Alien Breed Evolution* is the most expensive Live Arcade game yet (in terms of creation) and will be split into several episodic parts.



Can you share one interesting anecdote about your time in the industry?
I was staying at a hotel with Allister Brimble (legendary audio man and good friend). He'd gone back to our hotel to watch TV while I popped down to ECTS to do some press interviews and got sucked into an industry party, then the pub, then got arrested and didn't return for 30+ hours. Meanwhile, Allister tried to entertain himself by unlocking my briefcase. He got to 700+ of the four-digit code before giving in. I think it was empty.

How has the industry changed?
In 20 years it's gone through twists and turns, fashions, technology focus, graphics focus (note the 'must be 3D' period of 1995-2005) and then the casual games movement. The biggest thing for me is that we started as a developer-cum-publisher back in 1990 and here we are again, in 2009, as a developer-cum-publisher now that digital distribution has given a lifeline to independents. It's remarkable that we've worked with all the major players (first and third parties) and are still here, viable and strong. There are few indies with our experience and skillsets around today, most similar teams got bought, went bust, broke up or whatever, yet we carry on. Not bad, eh? *

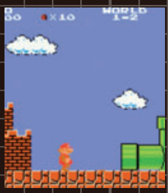




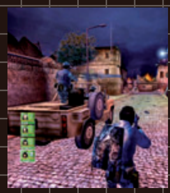
11 September–8 October

retrodiary

» A month of retro events both past and present



13 September 1985
■ The successful *Super Mario Bros* was released on NES, initially in Japan, and was the biggest selling game on the console.



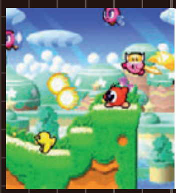
13 September 2002
■ The first game in the *Conflict* series, *Desert Storm* is released in Europe on PS2, Xbox and PC. Man, it was crap…



13 September 2005
■ The teeny-weeny Game Boy Micro is officially released in Japan with North American following on the 19 September.



14 September 2001
■ *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* is released across the UK on PlayStation 2.



18 September 2009
■ The latest game in the *Kirby* saga, *Super Star Ultra* finally arrives in the UK for Nintendo's DS.



16 September 1983
■ Camputers released its newly upgraded 96K version of the Lynx computer just six months after the 48K machine.



14 September 2007
■ The oddly named *Freshly-Picked Tingle's Rosy Rupeeland*, based on the *Zelda* character, was released on Nintendo DS.



14 September 2001
■ Nintendo's GameCube makes its debut in Japan.



19 September 1995
■ Capcom's spooky (and incredibly testing) platform game *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* is released in the arcades.



23 September 1889
■ Nintendo was formed by Fusajiro Yamauchi as Nintendo Koppai, a company that made Japanese playing card games.



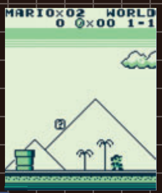
26 September 1986
■ The first *Castlevania* game was produced by Konami for the Famicom Disk System and released in Japan.



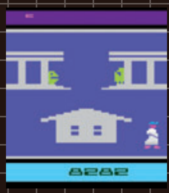
26 September 2007
■ Developed by Bungie and published by Microsoft, *Halo 3* is released on Xbox 360 in the UK.



29 September 1996
■ Nintendo launches its newest games console, the N64, in America priced $199.



28 September 1990
■ *Super Mario Land* was released on Game Boy, marking Mario's first appearance on the system.



28 September 1983
■ The *New York Times* reports on a vast cartridge-dumping operation being instigated by Atari at a landfill site in New Mexico.



27 September 2007
■ Live Publishing, the original company behind **Retro Gamer** (the beautiful magazine in your hands) fell into bankruptcy.



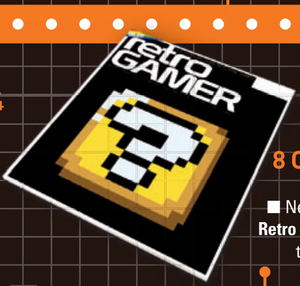
1 October 2009
■ Due for release in America and Europe is Sony's newest addition to the handheld console family, the PSPgo.



2 October 2009
■ *Space Invaders Extreme* prepares to land. Now with *Space Invaders* Bingo. Surely that's all sorts of win?



8 October 1984
■ Gargoyle Games releases its atmospheric graphic adventure *Tir Na Nog* on Spectrum. Sidhe!



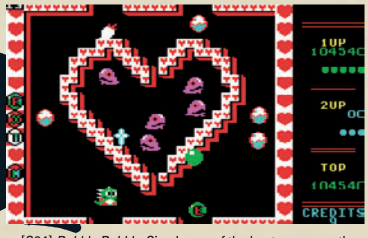
8 October 2009
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 1987



JULY 1987 – Multiformat magazine madness, Spectrum Plus 3 apathy, Creative Sparks gone out, Amsoft releases nothing, Road Runner races Star Paws and Laurel & Hardy find their slapstick is all stick and no slap. Richard Burton finds himself in another fine mess…



» [C64] *Bubble Bobble*: Simply one of the best games on the C64 and better still in two-player mode.



» [C64] *Rastan*: A good conversion of a great arcade game. Shame the C64 version was so buggy, though…



» [C64] *Wizball* is, even today, a shining example of what 8-bit gaming was all about. Just about perfect.

Newsfield Publications, the force behind *Crash* and *Zzap!64*, announced that it would be launching a new multiformat magazine at September's PCW Show. *The Games Machine* would mix 8 and 16-bit gaming while keeping up with the latest advancements in the console world. Newsfield confidently stated that "there will really be no competition" for the magazine. The first issue would arrive in October.

Call it coincidence or a jammy twist of fate, but Future Publishing also felt the urge to reveal details of its own new multiformat magazine. *ACE* would cover the same areas as *The Games Machine* and its first issue would also be at the newsagents in October.

The Spectrum Plus 3, Amstrad's disk-based take on Sinclair's classic machine, was given a firm launch date of 1 August. It was to have been released in July but a sense of malaise regarding the system from software houses and retailers needed addressing.

Dissenters questioned whether a disk drive on a Spectrum was even viable considering that the 16-bit machines didn't cost that much more. The Plus 3 had a planned release price of £249, while Atari announced this month that it would be reducing the price of its 520STFM – the one with the built-in modulator and floppy drive – to £299 in September.



» It's new, and it's from Newsfield. First issue out next month and no competition whatsoever apparently… apart from Future's *ACE*…

Even WHSmith, which had always been a supporter of Sinclair's machines from the ZX80 days, was still contemplating taking the machine as part of its range. It did.

Creative Sparks, the software house behind a trio of *Danger Mouse* games and a plethora of average fare, announced that it had gone into receivership. The parent company, CSD, which owned the Creative Sparks and Sparklers labels, as well as Mikro-Gen, which had been bought out at the end of 1986, had gone into liquidation, owing upwards of £750,000. Ironically, most of that debt was owed to Thorn EMI, which used to own CSD until a buyout in 1985.

Arcade conversion news: the Amstrad version of *Paperboy* was belatedly getting released by Elite Systems a year behind the Spectrum and C64 versions. It was graphically good and the playability was there, but it lacked any audio whatsoever. Not even a Spectrum-esque farty rasp as a paper hits an old man in the face…



» [Amstrad] *Paperboy*: Nice colourful graphics for the belated CPC rendition. The lack of sound, though, was almost disturbing.

Certainly not skimping on the sound was the forthcoming release of *Bubble Bobble*, converted by Firebird. It managed to mix a cavalcade of marvellous aural pleasure with a terrific two-player option, ensuring a huge hit. Most systems would be catered for and there wasn't a dud among them.

Also muscling in on the arcade scene was Amstrad's software arm, Amsoft, which had reportedly released *Spy Hunter*, *Zaxxon* and a triple-pack compilation containing *Buck Rogers*, *Congo Bongo* and *Up & Down*. Quite where any of these games wandered off to after the magazine previews was anyone's guess, as not one of them was ever released. *Spy Hunter* eventually made it out as a budget release… and even that was pretty ropey…

Lastly, Ocean Software revealed plans for four games due out within a few months. The pick of the bunch was *Rastan Saga*, the classic hack-and-slash scrolling adventure, which would be accompanied by *Victory Road*, *Gryzor* and *Psycho Soldier*.

After the shenanigans concerning US Gold's

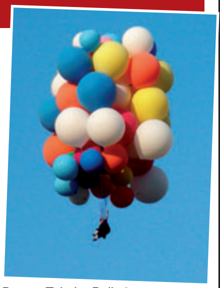


» [Amiga] *Starglider*: Flying through space, killing aliens with vector-style graphics – what's not to like?

THIS MONTH IN… CHARTS

1987

JULY NEWS

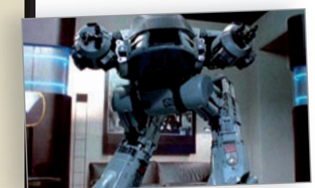


» Due to *Tubular Bells 6* not selling that well, Branson had to downscale his balloon adventure.

24 July saw MP and novelist Jeffrey Archer awarded over £1 million in damages and costs after the *Daily Star* had alleged that Archer had paid prostitute Monica Coghlan for sex.

Archer won and was understandably very happy. That was until 1999 when his once friend, Ted Francis, let slip that he provided a false alibi. Archer found himself in court charged with perverting the course of justice and perjury. This time he wasn't so fortunate, being sentenced to four years in prison.

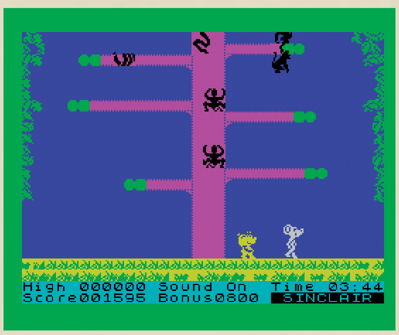
3 July saw Swedish adventurer Per Lindstrand and Virgin owner Sir Richard Branson become the first to pilot a hot-air balloon across the Atlantic Ocean. The Virgin Atlantic Flyer shattered the distance record for a hot-air balloon, which stood at 900 miles, increasing it to 3,075 miles. It was also the first balloon to travel in the fast-flowing trans-Atlantic jet streams, attaining speeds of 130mph.



» Ray Harryhausen would have been pleased with the animation in *RoboCop*… in 1974.

Not one to miss out on an opportunity, Virgin Games quickly released *Trans-Atlantic Balloon Challenge* on the CPC, C64 and Spectrum. It was rubbish.

17 July saw the premiere of *RoboCop*, as he took on OCP and its comedic stop-frame animated ED-209 law enforcement Airfix kit. It was a terrific film that led to Ocean Software obtaining the rights to create a game version. That was most certainly not rubbish.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Danger Mouse In Double Trouble*: Creative Sparks had gone into receivership, mainly due to its games being crap.

licensed version of *Road Runner* and Software Project's aborted version, the two found themselves going head to head.

Software Project's *Star Paws*, the end result of the unreleased *Attack Of The Mutant Zombie Flesh Eating Chickens From Mars* being reprogrammed on the C64 and ported back to the Spectrum, was released in the same week as US Gold's *Road Runner*.

With the C64 and Spectrum versions of *Road Runner* released alongside C64 *Star Paws*, the chart would make interesting reading over the next few months…



» [C64] *Laurel & Hardy*: Well that's another fine mess you've programmed yourself into, Advance. Hooray for Harold Lloyd!

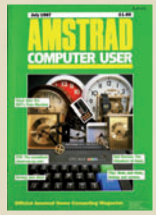
Incentive Software's stated that it was ready to release its new game, *Driller*, a jaunty 3D environment game created using Freescape, its graphical development tool that allows for realistic three-dimensional landscapes. It looked most impressive, but would the graphically rich product be subdued by the snail's pace in-game 'action' as the 8-bit micros spontaneously combusted due to boredom? Probably.

Oddest tie-in of the month was *Laurel & Hardy*, released on the C64 by Advance. The premise of the game was simple: sling custard pies at your opponent. Of course, you have to find them and therein lay the problem: the town in which you reside is a whopper and the game died a slow and painful death from there on as you search aimlessly for pies. Dull gameplay made worse by an awful rendition of the duo's theme certainly doesn't sound like a laugh…

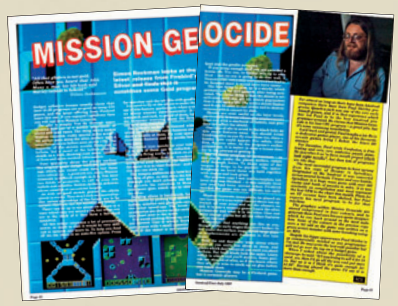
Amstrad Action ran the rule over *Hydrofool* (FTL), *Amaurote* (Mastertronic), *Arkanoid* (Imagine), *Krakout* (Gremlin Graphics) and *Challenge Of The Gobots* (Ariolasoft), awarding each an AA Rave. The Mastergame for the month was *Passengers On The Wind* (Infogrames).

Computer & Video Games had its customary two Games of the Month: *Oink* (CRL) and *The Last Ninja* (System 3), both for the C64. The slightly less excellent *C&VG* Hit award was conferred upon *Wizball* (Ocean, C64), *Mercenary* (Novagen, Amstrad), *Hydrofool* (FTL, Amstrad), *Army Moves* (Imagine, C64), *Stormbringer* (Mastertronic, Spectrum), *Starglider* (Rainbird, Amiga) and *Silent Service* (MicroProse, Amiga).

AMSTRAD COMPUTER USER



A glance at the interview among the pages of *ACU* would suggest that Jeff Minter had become interested in the Amstrad. Closer inspection revealed Paul Shirley, the programmer behind *Spindizzy*, talking about his new game for the Amstrad: *Mission Genocide*.



CRASH



Continuing with the long-haired beardy programmer theme was *Crash*, which conducted an interview with the coder behind *Tau Ceti*, Pete Cooke. He was primarily talking about his new game, *Micronaut One*, but covered old ground, letting slip that *Tau Ceti* was partly inspired by Firebird's *Gyron*. Nice beard.



ZZAP!64



The mighty *Wizball* arrives and is immediately swamped by an avalanche of superlatives by the *Zzap!* reviewers. To be fair, it completely deserved all the accolades it received, being an original concept yet executed brilliantly in every aspect. Martin Galway's music was superb too. No beard here, though.



JULY 1987

MUSIC



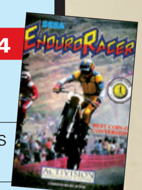
1 It's A Sin (Pet Shop Boys)
2 Under The Boardwalk (Bruce Willis)
3 Wishing Well (Terence Trent D'Arby)
4 Star Trekkin' (The Firm)
5 Always (Atlantic Starr)

SPECTRUM



1 Feud (Bulldog)
2 BMX Simulator (Code Masters)
3 Enduro Racer (Activision)
4 Olli And Lissa (Firebird)
5 Six Pak (Hit Pak)

COMMODORE 64



1 Enduro Racer (Activision)
2 Four Great Games (Micro Value)
3 Six Pak (Hit Pak)
4 Into The Eagle's Nest (Pandora)
5 Park Patrol (Firebird)

ATARI XE/XL

1 Gauntlet (US Gold)
2 Attack Of The Mutant Camels (Mastertronic)
3 Micro Rhythm (Firebird)
4 Death Race (Atlantis)
5 Colony (Bulldog)



BACK TO THE NINETIES



THE LATEST NEWS FROM MARCH 1992

MARCH 1992 – Colour Game Boy mooted, Mirrorsoft booted, Football Manager reborn, Quasimodo has a hunch he's back, Zero gets a facelift, the Bubble Bobble story continues and US Gold grabs Street Fighter. Richard Burton gets Sonic Boom...



» [Amstrad] *Football Manager 3*: Like the original but with more options, more colour and better graphics. But not as good…



» [Amiga] *Harlequin*: Shock, horror! An original platform game with stylish graphics that played really well. Odd but good.



» [Amiga] *Risky Woods*: If you like *Ghosts 'N Goblins* then this would give you rigor mortis of the trouser region.

The rumour-mongers were having a field day, stirring the pot of half-truths with their reports of the latest CES gaming extravaganza in the USA. The big gossip doing the rounds at the show was mysterious unsubstantiated reports that Nintendo's insanely popular Game Boy handheld games machine would be superseded by a colour version of the system and that it would become available in the not-too-distant future. The rumour spread like wildfire, with Nintendo stating that it knew nothing, which did little to dampen the fervour.

This overly optimistic prediction was eventually realised when the Game Boy Color was indeed released… at the back end of 1998, a mere six and a half years later. Nostradamus would've been proud.

Mirrorsoft, the software arm of Mirror Group Newspapers, had been running into difficulties after the death of owner Robert Maxwell, who had drowned in November. After his death, Mirrorsoft was forced to halt all development work, and finished but unreleased projects were shelved indefinitely until the administration of the software house could be clarified. It wasn't.

Mirrorsoft and all impending projects were sold to Acclaim Entertainment, which also included several finished Sega Mega Drive games such as *Back To The Future Part III*, *Xenon 2* and *Speedball 2*. Acclaim stated that it was planning to release the finished games almost immediately, understandably attempting to recoup some of the expenditure from the Mirrorsoft purchase.

It may very well be a time of technological gaming advancements, with high-powered machines like the Neo Geo appearing on the scene, but there was also room for a step back to the simpler retro gaming days. Over ten years since the original game appeared, *Football Manager 3* by Addictive (now owned by Prism Leisure) promised much in the way of enhancements over *Football Manager 2* and the antiquated original.

No doubt 'motivated' – cue pound signs on rolling eyeballs effect – by the forthcoming European Championships, *FM3* was passable but not nearly as playable as *FM2* and arguably not even as absorbing as Kevin Toms' original.

Another company taking advantage of forthcoming sporting events was US Gold – shock horror – which had bagged the official rights to the Olympics being held in Barcelona later in the year. US Gold suggested that it would release its game, *Olympics '92*, across all the Sega platforms. It did indeed and it was generally pretty good gaming fare.

The highly anticipated conversion of Taito's *Parasol Stars: The Story Of Rainbow Islands II* was imminent, marked by Ocean's press release announcing its April arrival. With the Amiga, ST and console versions almost ready to go, keen players would get to feast on the third instalment of the colourful arcade games series. *Parasol Stars* itself was never actually released as an arcade machine, so Ocean had to convert the original version: the superb PC-Engine edition. The new releases certainly did the PC-Engine version justice.

Another golden oldie getting a once-over with a damp flannel was *Hunchback* by Ocean. The mighty humpster was to get an outing on Nintendo's Game Boy in *Super Hunchback*. What's so



» Rumours were abound that the Game Boy Color was coming soon. Don't hold your breath, though…



» [Master System] *Olympic Gold: Barcelona '92*: A good, solid game, but it had nothing that really grabbed you by the discus.



» [Atari ST] *Street Fighter II*: The arcade game? A landmark. The home micro versions were the complete polar opposite.

1992

MARCH NEWS

24 March saw an announcement that *Punch*, the satirical magazine published since 1841, was to cease publication due to losses of £1.5 million a year. The early April edition was to be the last.

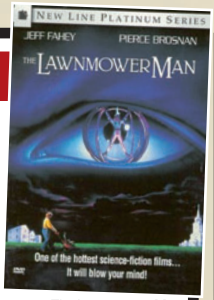
It made a comeback four years later when Mohamed Al Fayed resuscitated it, but the running costs were high and the readership worse than ever. *Punch* disappeared for good in 2002.

On 19 March the Duke and Duchess of York announced that they were to separate after almost six years of marriage. They divorced in 1996.

25 March saw Sergei Krikalyov, a Russian cosmonaut, return to Earth after spending ten months on the Mir space station. Krikalyov later went on to break the record for time spent in space, with 803 days.

In what was a dismal month at the cinema for new releases, the premiere of *Basic Instinct* on 20 March only really caught the eye – in more ways than one…

Also receiving its premiere in March was *The Lawnmower Man*, in which virtual reality met gardening, with tragic consequences.



» *The Lawnmower Man* was loosely based on a short story by Stephen King. It was also very, very rubbish.


» Krikalyov has spent more days in space than you've had hot dinners… possibly.




» [Amiga] *Xenon 2: Megablast*: A cracking shoot-'em-up, with Bomb The Bass leaving their musical presence.


» [Game Boy] *Super Hunchback*: *Hunchback* is back and he has a hunch. Esmerelda needs rescuing, all in glorious monochrome.

super about it? Not sure, to be honest… There's lots of platform jumping and fruit collecting and a sprinkling of hidden levels, but whether this qualified as being "Super" was debatable.

Still, it was eight years since Ocean's original *Hunchback* came out, so to see Quasimodo swinging to Esmerelda's rescue must have brought a nostalgic glow to even the most hard-nosed gamer.

With *Street Fighter II* wowing everyone in the arcades, it came as no surprise to hear that the licence to develop home computer versions had been secured by US Gold. Would it be a corker or something akin to its conversion of *OutRun*? US Gold once again flattered to deceive and took a fabulous arcade game and turned it into a stinker.

LucasArts was still basking in the glory of its magnificent *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* when, unsurprisingly, it let slip that it was thinking of extending the franchise to a third instalment. Amiga, ST and PC owners started rejoicing and began waiting. Finally, in 1997, *The Curse Of Monkey Island* appeared, but only on Windows-based PCs. No fair…

Computer & Video Games had given its *C&VG* Hit thumbs-up to a small selection of games this month, with *Desert Strike* (Electronic Arts, Mega Drive), *Dynablaster* (Ubisoft, Amiga), *Harlequin* (Gremlin Graphics, Amiga) and *Lemmings* (Sunsoft/Psygnosis, SNES) all giving the *C&VG* reviewers warm, throbbing happiness.

The multiformat magazine *Zero* had suffered a makeover. From being a good-looking magazine in February, it had turned into a garish comic-like offering. To add to its woes, the old awards were kicked into touch in favour of the "Mutt's Nuts", complete with cartoon dog licking its own balls. Three issues later, *Zero* was gone…

In the meantime, though, *Zero* awarded a handful of Dog's Bollocks to *Super WrestleMania* (Acclaim, SNES), *Legend* (Mindscape, Amiga), *Formula One Grand Prix* (MicroProse, Atari ST), *Risky Woods* (Electronic Arts, Amiga) and *Terminator 2* (Acclaim, Game Boy).

Elsewhere, you could console yourself with *Mean Machines* and the two lonely Mega Game recipients. Impressing this month were *Buck Rogers: Countdown To Doomsday* (Electronic Arts, Mega Drive) and *Jackie Chan's Action Kung-Fu* (Nintendo, NES). Both, seemingly, were vying for longest game title of the month.

THIS MONTH IN…

MEAN MACHINES



Scoring highly in the reviews was *California Games* by US Gold. The Mega Drive version was a cornucopia of colour and sound, which transported you to sunnier climes with bikinis and sand rather than a wet and windy Sunday afternoon in the UK.



SEGA FORCE



With the European Championships occurring in the summer, Tecmo decided to update its arcade hit *World Cup '90* to coincide with said proceedings. Although the Mega Drive game was as solid as ever, *World Cup '92* just led to confusion. Another World Cup? Already?



THE ONE



The One featured an interview with Al Lowe, designer behind the *Leisure Suit Larry* series. If Al had got his way the character would have been called Leisure Suit Gary, after a smooth-talking Sierra salesman who was keen to report his pick-up stories to the staff. Thankfully, Larry was used.



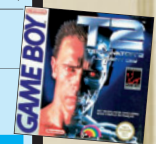
CHARTS

MARCH 1992

SEGA MEGA DRIVE



1 Desert Strike (Electronic Arts)
2 Streets Of Rage (Sega)
3 Test Drive II (Accolade)
4 Road Rash (Electronic Arts)
5 Mario Lemieux Hockey (Sega)



GAME BOY

1 Terminator 2 (Acclaim)
2 Super Mario Land (Nintendo)
3 Kick Off (Anco)
4 Choplifter 2 (Nintendo)
5 Duck Tales (Nintendo)



NES

1 Rescue Rangers (Nintendo)
2 Super Mario Bros 3 (Nintendo)
3 WWF (Acclaim)
4 Terminator 2 (Acclaim)
5 Kick Off (Anco)

MUSIC

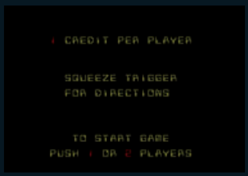
1 Stay (Shakespears Sister)
2 I Love Your Smile (Shanice)
3 My Girl (The Temptations)
4 Finally (Ce Ce Peniston)
5 To Be With You (Mr Big)



16

DISCS OF TRON

BALLY'S MULTI-SENSORY GAME OF FRISBEE



- » **PUBLISHER:** BALLY MIDWAY
- » **RELEASED:** 1983
- » **GENRE:** SPORTS
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £300–£400



HISTORY

Most people of a certain age will remember the Disney film Tron and the arcade game that it inevitably spawned given the film's game-based storyline. One of the scenes involved a deadly game of Frisbee, where combatants battled to the death with electrically charged discs. The original Tron game had planned to include this section, but Bally decided to launch the game in its own right.

As a classic arcade gaming experience, *Discs Of Tron* stands out as one of the first multi-sensory titles, with some cabinets requiring you to stand on a glowing platform, with surround sound and lighting effects linked to the on-screen action, and as such it drew in some large crowds. The game display used a novel mirrored effect that projected the raster graphics onto a glass with high-resolution painted graphics behind.

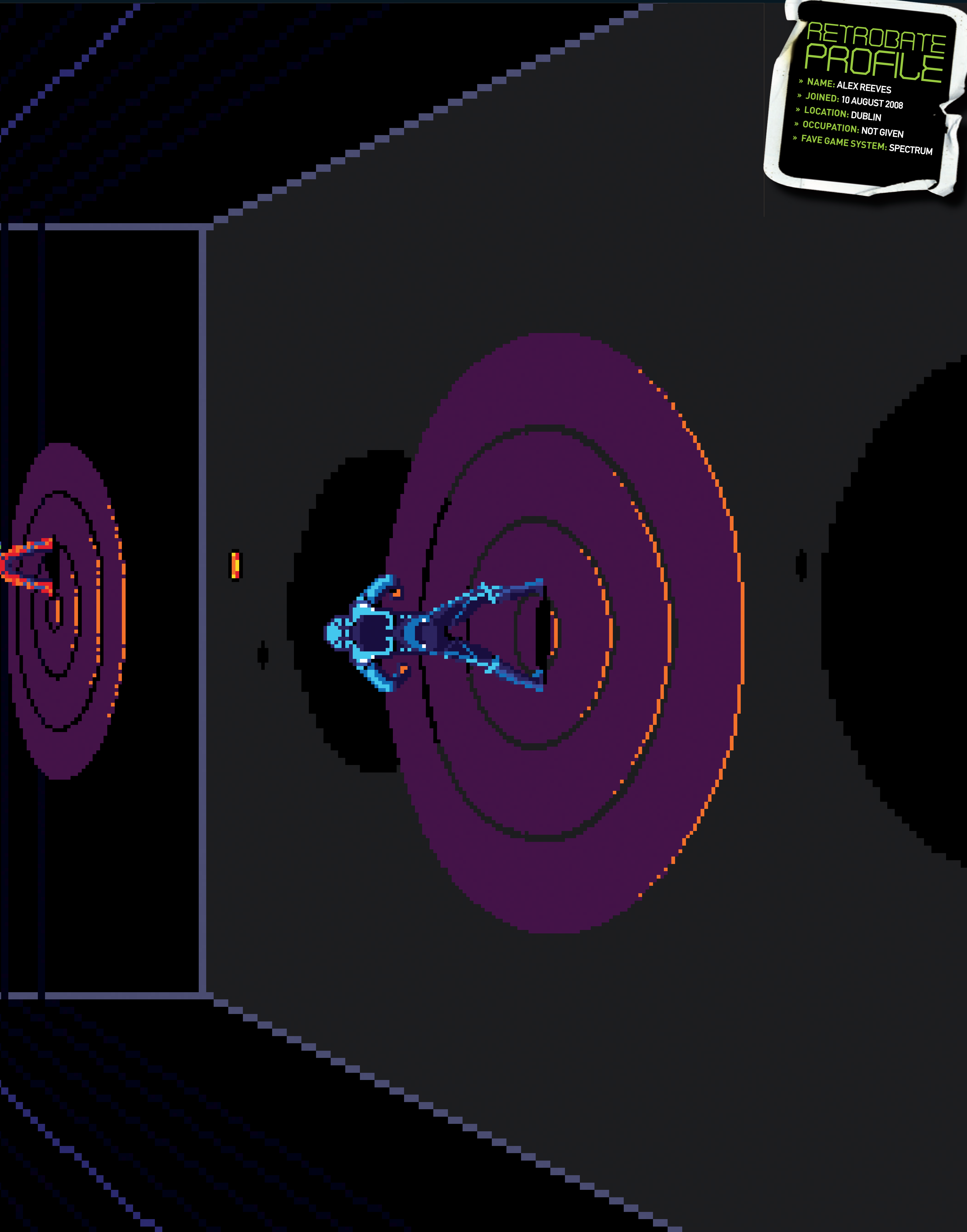
The objective of the game – played in a kind of space-age squash court – is to knock the enemy player, Sark, from one of his circular platforms by hitting him with your Frisbee discs, of which three could be in play at once. You also had to avoid discs thrown by Sark by using the deflect feature or smashing his disc in mid-air with yours. By timing the throws correctly you could knock Sark off before he has a chance to move platforms.

To complicate matters, Sark also has green energy balls, which he can fire at you. These split into multiples and cannot be deflected, they can, however, be destroyed with your discs. There are also special chaser discs that track you – destroying these requires multiple hits.

As the levels progress, the platforms vary in height and quantity. Walls will also appear to block direct shots. You can even shoot each other's platforms when in the raised position, requiring you to visit them in order to keep them. In stand-up cabinet format *Discs Of Tron* was merely good, but in the surround cabinet it became a genuine arcade experience.

Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net





RETROBATE PROFILE

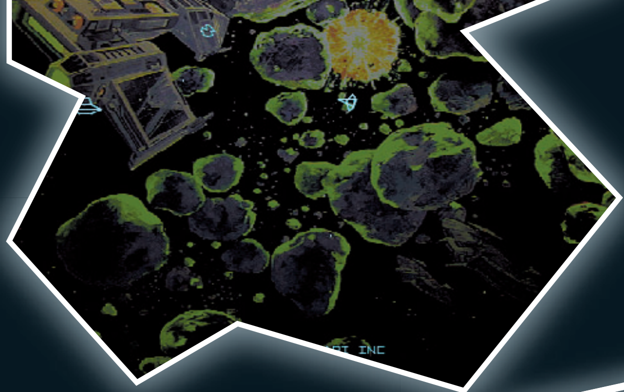
» **NAME:** ALEX REEVES
» **JOINED:** 10 AUGUST 2008
» **LOCATION:** DUBLIN
» **OCCUPATION:** NOT GIVEN
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** SPECTRUM

THE MAKING OF…

Under attack from Taito's Space Invaders, Atari responded with its own take on interstellar combat. To mark Asteroids' 30th anniversary, Paul Drury spoke to Ed Logg, Howard Delman and Lyle Rains about the game's creation

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLATFORM:** COIN-OP
- » **RELEASED:** 1979
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £500+ FOR AN ORIGINAL CABINET



ROIDS

It's late-summer 1979 and engineer Ed Logg is preparing for a trip to Old Sacramento, California. He packs the retrofit kit for *Atari Football*, designed to upgrade the plays and prolong the game's arcade life. Joining him on the journey is colleague Collette Weil, but Ed decides to take another companion along for the ride: the project he's being working on since the spring.

Once at the arcade, his baby is carefully placed among the rows of blinking cabs. There's no fancy silk-screen and the cabinet art is incomplete but the lighted panel clearly displays the name of this newborn: *Asteroids*. The proud father stands back and waits.

"A guy walks over and puts in his quarter," smiles Ed, "and he died three times in about 20 seconds. Then he reached out and put another quarter in. I thought, okay, if he's dying three times and still putting in another quarter, he must think it's his fault, not that the game has got it in for him. He died again, almost instantly. He put in quarter after quarter after quarter…"

He was to be the first of many. *Asteroids* epitomised the 'easy to learn, difficult to master' philosophy of game design and Atari shifted a staggering 75,000 units, making it its biggest selling coin-op. "I heard people saying we only made about half of the machines out there," adds Ed. "I've certainly seen counterfeit boards…"

Success breeds imitation, though the journey to that first field test in Sacramento actually began almost a decade before, thanks to a little inspiration from the daddy of all space shooters. "I'd played four-player *Space War* back in the early-Seventies on a PDP machine in the Stanford Research Lab," recalls Ed. "Down on campus in the Stanford Forum, they had two machines linked up and you could play for a quarter. Was I any good? Oh no! The other guys would cream my ass over and over again."

Though no maestro on this makeshift multiplayer cab, Ed undoubtedly knew what made a good game. His work on *Super Breakout*, released in 1978, proved he knew how to revisit an idea and add his own unique signature without losing the original appeal. But when his boss, Lyle Rains, called him into his office the following April, it was to discuss a game's failure to launch.

"Lyle was talking about an older game I remember seeing once and playing but it was just not fun," recalls Ed. "You were trying to shoot the other player but this asteroid was in the way. Players tried to shoot it – I know I did – even though it couldn't be destroyed. He said everyone just seems to shoot the rock, so let's create a game that lets you blow it up"

"I don't really remember what that old game was," explains Lyle of that pivotal first meeting. "It may have been something I had seen in the labs and subconsciously picked up on the asteroid theme. I think of *Computer Space* as being more of the inspiration for the two-dimensional approach. You see, the biggest hit videogame at that time, perhaps of all time, was *Space Invaders*, which was predominately one-dimensional player control – left and right – with all the threats approaching from above. It was basically *Breakout* with moving bricks and a gun, instead of a ball and paddle. I was seeking a more satisfying two-dimensional game with a similar addictive gameplay theme of 'completion': eliminate all threats. I believe I described the concept to Ed in a few sentences: little flying ship as in *Computer Space*; big rocks becoming little rocks; fly and shoot till they all go away. There was no great detail."

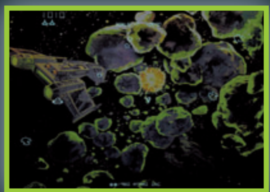
> **"I suggested the Asteroids idea more as a creative exercise than a full-blown project"**
>
> LYLE RAINS ON WHY EXERCISE IS GOOD FOR YOU



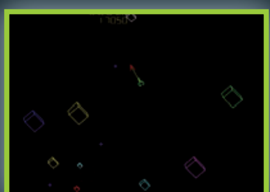
» Ed poses with a special version of his famous creation.

THE MAKING OF… ASTEROIDS

ROCK ON – ASTEROIDS SEQUELS



ASTEROIDS DELUXE (1980)
Dave Shepherd took Ed's code and added a shield and new enemies. Ed: "I was busy being a supervisor and had no involvement. I find it a little too hard." We agree. The killer satellite is just vicious.



SPACE DUEL (1982)
A colourful reworking by Owen Rubin, with inventive co-op play and wonderful spinning shapes. Ed: "My initial reaction was that it was very abstract, perhaps too abstract for the casual player."



BLASTEROIDS (1987)
Ed Rotberg added power-ups, ship morphing, branching levels, bosses and the ability to dock your ships in multiplayer for added firepower. Best played on an original cab with spinner controllers.

Though both men quickly agreed on the basics of the gameplay and indeed the name *Asteroids*, which emerged at this concept stage, they initially disagreed on the format of the project. "Lyle wanted to do it on raster and I said no, no, let's do it on vector," says Ed. 'I'd had some experience of working with vector technology. The higher resolution meant you had more control of where you were aiming, not just this blob."

Lyle chuckles: "Ed wanted to fool around with the new vector, or XY hardware before starting his next project. I suggested the game idea more as a creative exercise than a full-blown project. Obviously it took on a life of its own."

And the giver of life was hardware engineer Howard Delman. Howard had worked on many of Atari's post-*Pong* successes, including *Super Bug* and the first simultaneous co-operative arcade game, *Fire Truck*. Game development in those pioneering days of the mid-Seventies was not clearly divided into software and hardware roles, meaning that Howard had a handle on both of these emerging fields. Having joined Atari in 1976, he also remembers a project that had been floating around for quite a while…

"There was this old game that had been worked on for a long time because no one could quite make it fun," he laughs. "It was originally called *Cosmos* and then became known as *Planet Grab*, a two-player game where you were trying to claim planets in space. The more you claimed, the more you scored, and you could steal planets from your opponent, too. As the game was being tweaked and people were trying to make it fun – because it really wasn't fun – someone made it so you could blow up the other guy's planets. And suddenly it was fun. Forget trying to steal his planets, just blow them up. You can see where this was heading… When they saw the vector hardware we were working on, they said 'Oh my God, that would be great for *Asteroids*'. Ed must have been the third programmer on that project. He came to me, I hooked him up with a board and he got to work."

And Howard still has that very board in his workshop, a mass of chips and wires and hand-scrawled notes. He's clearly proud recalling the story of how he came to be in charge of handling Atari's first steps into the shining light of vector game development.

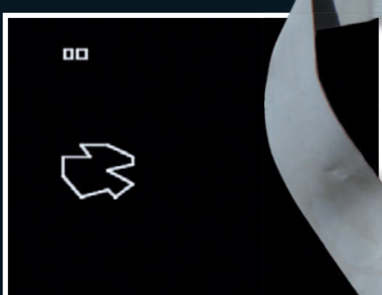
"In early-1978, vector games started to emerge, but not from Atari," he begins. "Atari had a research-and-development group in Grass Valley. They came up with an XY display system, or at least laid the groundwork for one, and came down to show it to us. It was really cool and we wanted it. They left it with us but it wasn't done, nor was it a platform to do games on. It was the basic hardware concept and I was given task of turning that into something we could use to ship a game. It was like I took this rough bit of clay and made it into something real."

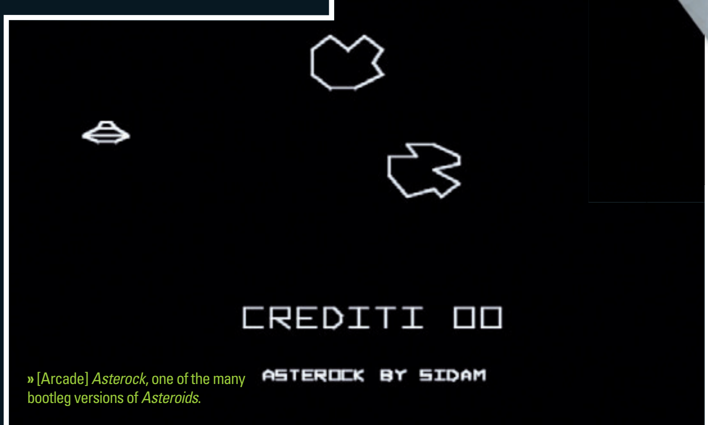
Howard was tasked with not only shaping this fascinating technology into something useable, he also had to decide on a game idea to showcase this great leap forward. He settled on *Lunar Lander*, which became Atari's first vector game, released exactly a decade after the historic moon landings. He was joined on the project by Rich Moore and also one Ed Logg, who worked on the distinctive alpha-numeric character set used for the on-screen text and scoring. Thus when Ed received his customised *Lunar Lander* board, bolstered with extra RAM and some bespoke 'jumps and cuts' from Howard, he had some knowledge of the new hardware.

"Man, that thing was tiny," chuckles Ed. "This little four-by-four inch board with five buttons and wires coming off it, linked up to a screen. I started by getting the ship on screen. I wanted to see it flying around…"



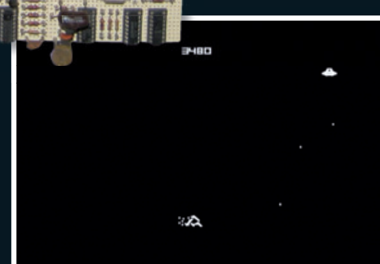
» A **Retro Gamer** exclusive, the modified Lunar Lander board created by Howard, which Ed used to develop Asteroids. The smaller board at the bottom contains those 13 sounds.





» [Arcade] *Asterock*, one of the many bootleg versions of *Asteroids*.



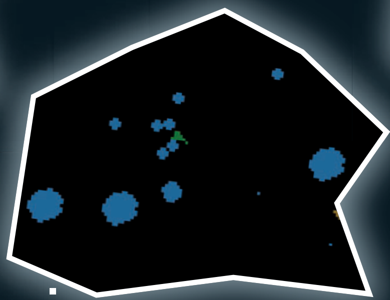


» [Arcade] Mr Bill makes a kill.

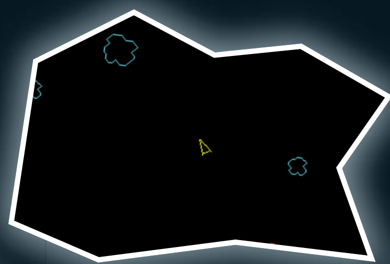
SEND IN THE CLONES



ASTEROIDS (ATARI 5200)
The VCS version was passable given the limited hardware, but this upped the ante with a smoother, more authentic experience.



MOONS OF JUPITER (VIC 20)
An impressive effort for the expanded Vic and much better than Simon Munnery's version for Bug Byte, famously described as "a pile of wank" by Jeff Minter.



METEORS (BBC MICRO)
Acornsoft had a knack of producing superior arcade clones and this had schoolboys praying for wet lunch breaks so they could play it on the school's computers.



MINESTORM (VECTREX)
Okay, we're pushing it here as this doesn't even feature any rock blasting, but it's clearly inspired by *Asteroids*, has beautiful vector graphics and is utterly ace.

And what a thing of beauty it was, that graceful inertia as your tiny triangular ship thrusts through the blackness of space. Yet it wasn't always so. Ed had toyed with having no friction to decrease the forward movement of your ship (which meant you spent most of your time desperately trying to stop yourself), and with no inertia at all (which made the game too easy) before arriving at his happy medium. It was typical of Ed's approach to the game's development: experimenting with different settings, many inspired by those early battles on *Space War*, to see which delivered the best experience and always on the look out for fortuitous side effects.

"It was all ad hoc at this point," explains Ed. "There was no design document. How did I get those cool vapour trails? That was just a property of those old monitors. They have phosphor and phosphor glows. You put that much electrical excitement into the phosphor, it takes a while for it to cool down and not glow, so it seems to leave this trace behind it."

With your ship in motion, Ed sketched out different asteroid shapes and had them drift across the screen in increasing numbers. As you blasted them into smaller pieces, strategies began to emerge. Should you concentrate on the smaller rocks or take out the largest first? Should you stay put in the centre of the field or weave through the debris? The former felt like the safest option, so Ed decided the player was going to need an incentive to get them moving.

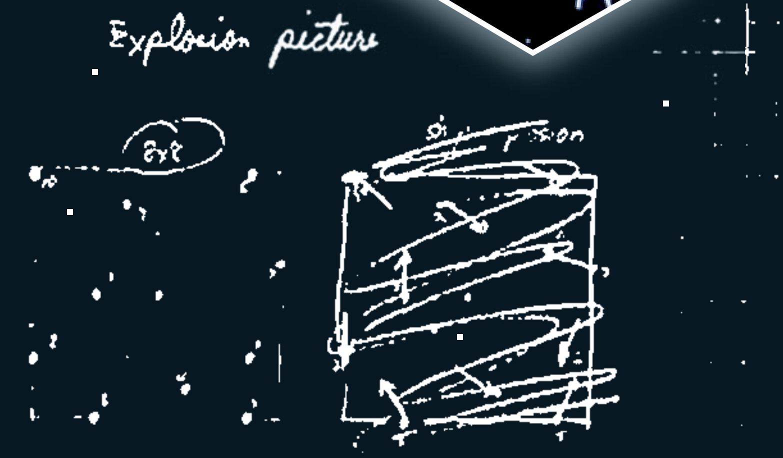
"I always wanted two saucers," he recalls. "A big one that fired randomly like cannon fodder to get you used to the concept that when you got down to fewer rocks, a ship was going to come out. The little saucer was about making you move. Run away, you're going to die if you stick around!"

Players developed a love-hate relationship with that little blighter. They loved the 1,000-point reward for shooting it, but cursed its deadly accuracy and increasing speed. Ed also employed a timer that steadily decreased, meaning respite between saucer attacks became ever shorter. "I wanted to discourage you from not shooting stuff. Get rid of those small rocks so I can send a new lot of bigger rocks out there, because more stuff on screen means more chance of an unfortunate collision."

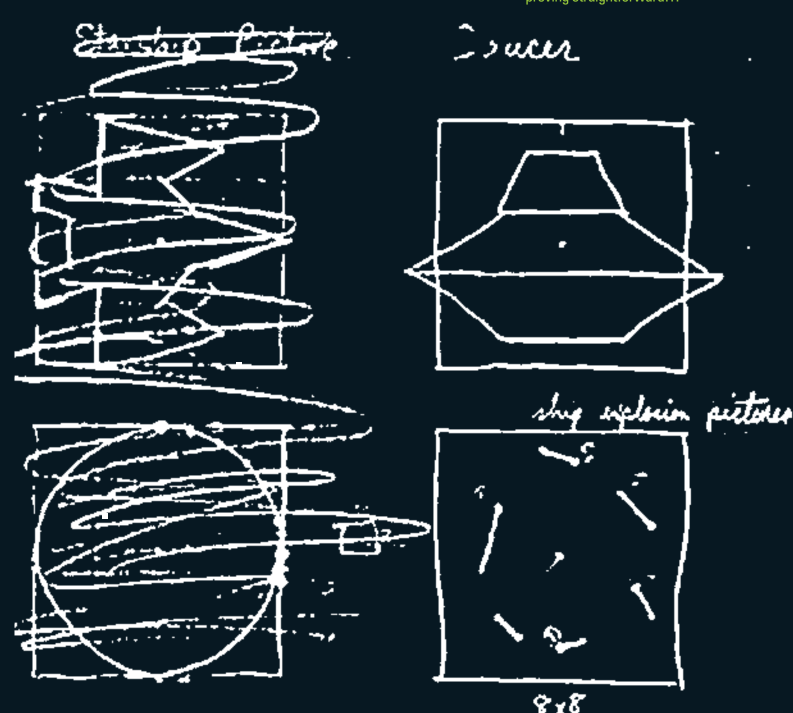
Of course, if you were really in a tight spot, you could hit hyperspace and take your chances. On re-entering the playfield, there was a random chance of your ship exploding, its three constituent parts torn asunder and gently fading in one of gaming's most lonesome deaths. "You know, I should have put some algorithm in so that if there were lots of rocks on screen you didn't have much chance of blowing up, but with only a few it was a much higher chance," concedes Ed. "And I still have regrets about the placement of the hyperspace button. It should have been nearer my right thumb, so I didn't have to take my hand off thrust to hit it. You know, with hindsight I should have put a shield in instead. If you got hit it was decreased so you had a few chances. That would have given you some more strategy…"

It's the only time Ed questions his design choices, but then he was getting positive daily feedback from his peers. The Atari labs were open-plan affairs, long halls with room for two or three games in development at any one time. Half a dozen staff would be based in each room, and engineers would wander between labs, passing comment and stopping to play as they went.

"Some engineers walking by would see a couple of asteroids floating across

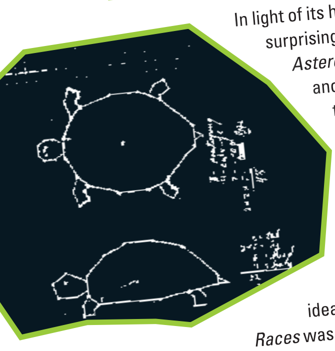


» Designing the large saucer wasn't proving straightforward…



THE MAKING OF… ASTEROIDS

TURTLE POWER



In light of its huge success, it seems surprising that Ed never revisited *Asteroids* nor did he produce another vector game. He cites the unreliability of the colour vector technology and his desire to work on something new, though he does reveal the little-known tale of *Turtleroids*. "Every year, Atari Coin-op had an off-site brainstorming session where we discussed new game ideas. For many years the idea of *Turtle Races* was proposed. This was a game where you raced your turtle by continuously increasing your voice to get your turtle to move. Increasing too quickly caused the turtle to go into its shell for a while. The idea was always shot down. I'm not sure if we turned every game idea into turtle this or turtle that, but one year Frank Ballouz got up in front of everyone and said 'no more turtles!' Of course, we took it as a challenge. We had waiters bring drinks with wind-up turtles in and did everything we could think of in the way of turtles. Someone suggested we change the Gold Asteroids in the lobby of Coin-op Engineering in Sunnyvale to have a turtle instead of a saucer, so I changed the graphics and burned a special program to do this. Hence, *Turtleroids*."

my screen and start humming the tune to Lawrence Welk's *Tiny Bubbles* just to tease me," chuckles Ed. "A lot of colleagues would come by and ask 'when are you leaving?' 'When can I play this game?' And you realise, okay, that's a good sign… Management would come in and check on progress. Lyle was certainly interested. He was, like, let's do a focus group, let's do a field test."

Yes, feedback from outside the company was overwhelmingly positive, too. Atari organised two focus groups in June 1979. On the 14th, they gathered together seven older players, veterans of *Space War*, and then on the 20th they tested *Asteroids* on nine children aged between 15 and 17, all *Space Invaders* fans. Ed and his fellow engineers observed proceedings through one-way glass and player comments were noted down meticulously. Ever the archivist, Ed has held on to these four pages of detailed feedback and it's fascinating to read how players first struggled to get to grips with the thrust button, requesting a joystick instead, and how the younger group, accustomed to taking shelter behind a base in *Space Invaders*, noted that you don't get a break in this game.

Ed is more circumspect when it comes to the value of these written responses. "I just look at their play and see what's going on. I always believe that if they don't get wowed immediately, you have a problem."

Players also commented on the way the sound effects built the tension, something Howard is especially proud of contributing. "That thump, thump, thump… I was really trying to do a heartbeat," he explains. "I sensed as the game sped up and you became more tense, your own heartbeat would speed up and I really wanted to keep them in sync. We didn't have sound chips back then so I created a hardware circuit for each of the 13 sounds by hand and wired them onto Ed's board myself."

Such was the intimate nature of creating videogames in those frontier days, and *Asteroids* stands as one of the period's crowning achievements. Released in November 1979, it went on selling for years, earning Atari an estimated $150 million in sales and a further $500 million in revenue from countless enthralled gamers.

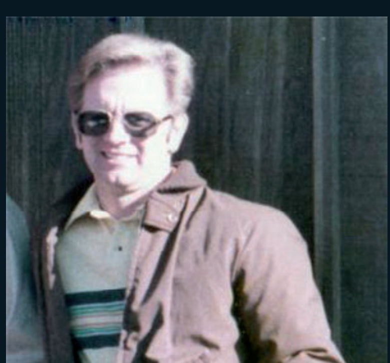
While nothing can truly detract from the game's enormous success, issues did arise post-release. Some were clearly technical: accumulate too many extra ships and the game slows to a crawl, and on some machines, if you got down to just your ship and a single asteroid, the display would fade out. "That's the spot killer," declares Ed.

"If the game dies, the vector beam would just point at wherever you last pointed it and burn a hole in the screen," he continues. "We had a piece of circuitry so that if you don't move the vector enough it shuts it down. I wasn't given any technical numbers, so I put the score at the top and the Atari copyright at the bottom and thought that, along with the ship and at least one asteroid, that would be enough to disable the spot killer and the video display wouldn't be turned off… turns out it wasn't. As for the slowdown, if you have hundreds of ships, the game can't draw everything at 60Hz per frame. I wasn't clever enough to limit it to ten ships or something. Anyway, I thought Mr Bill would come out and blow you away…"

For our non-American readers, Mr Bill and Sluggo are characters from US variety show *Saturday Night Live* and became the unofficial names for the two saucers. The fact that Ed Logg received a cease and desist letter from their copyright holders, despite there being no reference to the Play-doh pair in the game itself, is an indication of how *Asteroids* had entered popular culture. And that was partly due to Mr Bill not doing his job…



» Ed's original sketches for the different rock shapes.



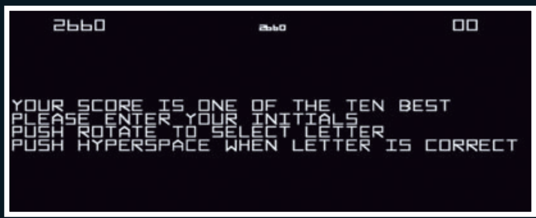
» Ed in 1983, after *Asteroids* and *Centipede* but before *Gauntlet*…



» The devilishly difficult *Asteroids Deluxe*.



» Scott Safran, whose *Asteroids* record still stands after 27 years.



» [Arcade] Ed took the idea for a high-score table from Exidy's *Star Fire*.



» An arcade flyer for the fancy cocktail cabinet.

ASTEROIDS MEMORIES



Owen Rubin

(CREATOR OF SPACE DUEL AND MAJOR HAVOC)

"*Asteroids* was being developed in a lab near mine. I used to go in and play late at night, sometimes until I filled up the high score table with my initials. Ed Logg would come in next morning, reset it, work on the game and come in the next day to find 'ORR' was in every spot on the table again. So he put in a check for 'ORR' and all other combinations of my initials so they'd be replaced with his. I sent a note telling him there was a bug till he told me what he'd done…"

Irene

(WIFE OF ED LOGG)

"*Asteroids* was my first experience of videogames. I did house sitting for some friends and they happened to have a machine. I'd play it when I was there and thought it was kinda fun and when they moved they gave it to me as a gift. Years later, I was introduced to Ed at a party by Ed Rotberg who said he'd like to introduce me to the best. No, I was not a groupie! I think Ed was supposed to sign my control panel. He still hasn't got round to it."





Tim Skelly

(VECTOR GAME PIONEER AT CINEMATRONICS)

"When I saw *Asteroids* at an AMOA show in Chicago, I thought, 'why didn't I think of that?' Its strength was that it allowed you to work out your own ways to win the game. Every player was free to break rocks and shoot saucers any way they pleased. It was an inspiration to me and to decades of game designers. When I was briefly working for Gremlin/Sega, the team there created a variation on it called *Space Meatball* or *F*** Your Buddy*, depending on the prototype. My point is, flexibility is fun, and *Asteroids* introduced wonderfully flexible gameplay."

> **"Asteroids is a man-against-machine game. However good you got, it was always one step ahead"**
>
> HOWARD DELMAN RAGES AGAINST THE MACHINE

"Originally, the small saucer used to come out and shoot instantly," explains Ed. "If you were right next to him he'd nail you. People said it wasn't fair, so I said okay, I'll give you a second before he takes his shot so you can see where he's at. Unfortunately that opened the big fat window to lurking."

Ah, the ancient art of lurking, where the proficient player leaves a solitary asteroid on screen and then hunts saucers for hours, sometimes days, accumulating mammoth scores. It reached its zenith in November 1982 when 15-year-old Scott Safran played a single game for an entire weekend setting the current world record of over 41 million (see **Retro Gamer** 28 for the full story) and the widespread use of the technique led many arcade owners to complain about these marathon games.

"What they didn't see was that some could play that long but a lot of other people would try," notes Ed. "So Joe might play for six hours on one quarter, but then all Joe's friends come in and try and be as good as Joe and put in a lot of money. That really contributed to both the game's popularity and its longevity. We actually made a new chip to prevent lurking, but a lot of operators found that with it their earnings went down and wanted it put back to the old way. *Asteroids* would have been successful anyway, but lurking became part of its lore…"

"Sure, there were those who could play forever, but the average player always felt that his failures were his own, that the game was fair, and he could do better next time," adds Lyle. "I think the 'secret' of *Asteroids'* phenomenal success was Ed's near-perfect tuning of the difficulty."

"It came out at a great time, too," says Howard. "Arcades were springing up everywhere. Offices were getting games, doctor's surgeries were getting them… there was an unprecedented demand and everyone in the business sold everything they had. The industry was hot back then. And *Asteroids* is a classic man-against-machine game. It was simple to learn, obvious what you had to do and you could improve quickly, but however good you got, the game was always one step ahead. I used to get into fights with marketing guys who wanted games with more colour, more things on screen, things to be more lifelike. I'd say it was all about gameplay, how fun something is."

Ladies and gentlemen, after 30 years we are still floating in space…

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BREAKOUT
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1978

LUNAR LANDER
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1979

CENTIPEDE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1980



THE EVOLUTION OF…

The Arena-Based Shooter

Join us as we travel through time and space to bring you the definitive guide to this classic sub-genre

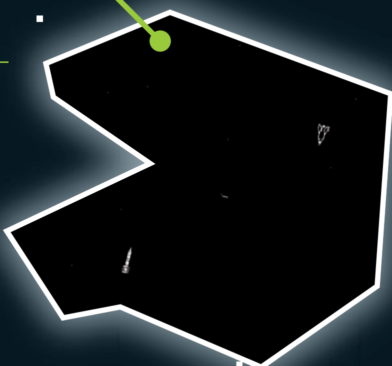
Spacewar!

YEAR RELEASED: 1962
NOTABLE ADDITIONS TO GENRE:
TWO-PLAYER MODE, LIMITED FUEL, LIMITED WEAPONS

The arena-based shooter, or, if you prefer, the multi-directional shooter, can be traced all the way back to the seminal *Spacewar!*, making the sub-genre an impressive 47 years old.

Created by the trinity of Martin 'Shag' Graetz, Steve 'Slug' Russell and Wayne Wiitanen, who obviously wasn't cool enough to have a nickname, it pits two ships against each other in a battle to the death.

Made for the PDP-1 and featuring such innovations as gravity, a hyperspace move for evading enemies and limited fuel and weapons, it set the groundwork for gaming's most enjoyable genre – at least as far as Darran's concerned.



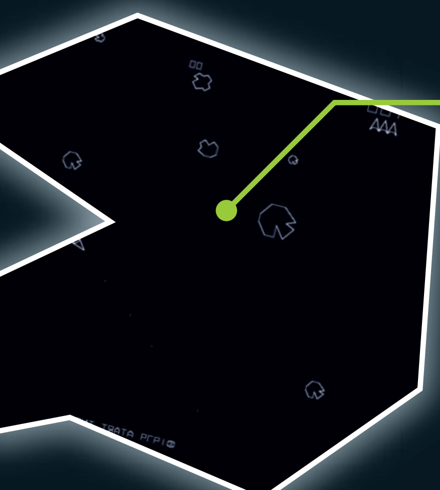
Computer Space

YEAR RELEASED: 1971
NOTABLE ADDITIONS TO GENRE:
MULTIPLE ENEMIES, TIME LIMIT

The second big step for the arena-based shooter appeared nine years after *Spacewar!* and introduced enemies to battle against. *Computer Space* was manufactured by Nutting Associates and created by Ted Dabney and Atari founder Nolan Bushnell.

Taking control of a rocket and using the same thrust system that would be seen in the likes of *Asteroids* and *Thrust*, the aim was to take down a pair of UFOs. Get a higher score than the flying saucers at the end of 90 seconds of play and you'd enter hyperspace and earn an additional 90 seconds of play. Scoring was tricky, however, as it would reset once you achieved more than nine points.

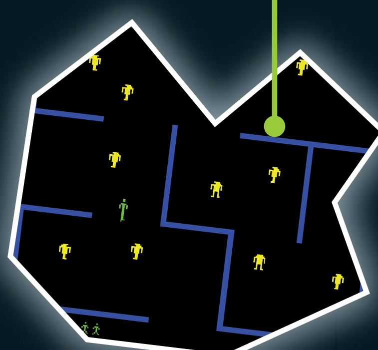




Asteroids

YEAR RELEASED: 1979
NOTABLE ADDITIONS TO GENRE:
PASSIVE OBJECTS, MULTIPLYING OBJECTS, RISK VS REWARD, WRAPAROUND LEVEL, INTELLIGENT ENEMIES

Ed Logg's *Asteroids* remains one of the most influential shooters around, but it still took elements from earlier games. The beauty of *Asteroids*, in addition to its wonderfully precise controls, was the fact that the mundane hunks of rock that you shot down would result in ever-smaller pieces, making the limited play area even more crowded as you desperately searched for a safe haven. Add in intelligent enemies – smaller UFOs would home in on you – and risk and reward gameplay – using hyperspace could sometimes allow you to cheat death – and it's little wonder that we're still addicted to it today.

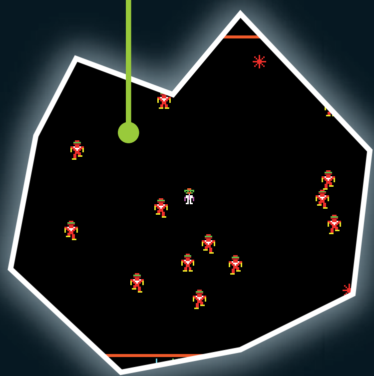


Berzerk

YEAR RELEASED: 1980
NOTABLE ADDITIONS TO GENRE:
INDESTRUCTIBLE ENEMIES, MAN AS PROTAGONIST, EXITS, DIGITISED SPEECH, CONTROVERSY

Within the space of a year, two teenagers died of heart attacks after posting high scores on Stern's game, making it one of the earliest videogames to have been possibly linked to a person's death.

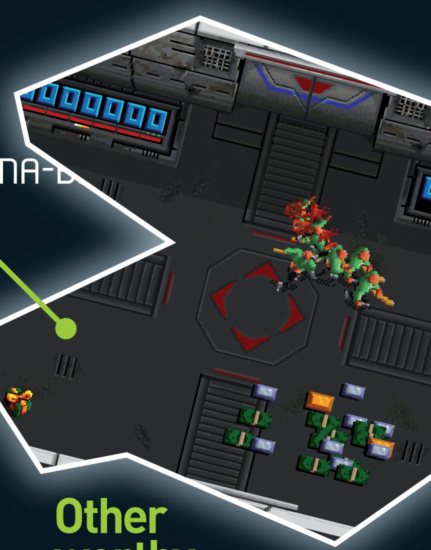
Let's dwell on *Berzerk*'s high points, however, and mention how it dumped the traditional spaceship for a little man, introduced digitised speech and also provided a new type of enemy that was totally indestructible. In addition to these juicy additions, the once-open stages were replaced with mazes. Add in bumbling robots and *Berzerk* is another worthy addition to our list.



Robotron: 2084

YEAR RELEASED: 1982
NOTABLE ADDITIONS TO GENRE:
DUAL CONTROLS, INCREASING WAVES, SCORE MULTIPLIERS

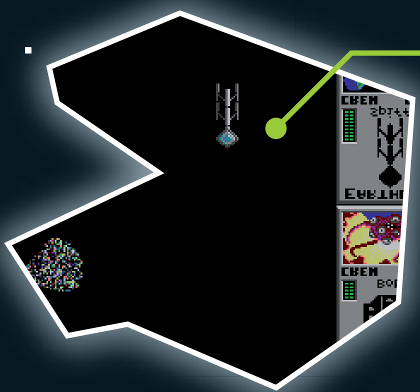
Eugene Jarvis's *Robotron: 2084* didn't introduce as many additions to the genre as its peers, but one of the few that it did are still in use today. After breaking his arm in a car accident and being frustrated with the difficulty it presented while playing *Berzerk*, Eugene came up with the addition of a second joystick that allowed you to independently fire in a different direction to where you were moving. It's an utterly superb idea that is still widely used today, especially on services like Xbox Live Arcade and Sony's PSN service. Include increasing enemy waves and the ability to continually boost your score (to 5,000) by collecting stranded humans and *Robotron*'s place in the history books is assured.



Smash TV

YEAR RELEASED: 1990
NOTABLE ADDITIONS TO GENRE:
BOSSES, POWER-UPS, MAPS

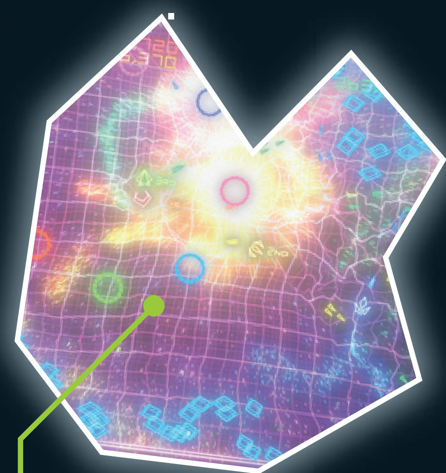
After the huge success of *Robotron: 2084*, Eugene revisited his twin-stick control formula with the wonderful *Smash TV*. Once again taking place in the future, *Smash TV* was set on a game show and had you and a friend shooting away at enemy hordes while picking up toasters, VCRs and as much money as you could lay your greedy hands on. The core gameplay of the genre was enhanced by the inclusion of different power-ups and huge bosses – incidentally, *Sinistar* did the boss thing first, but we consider its levels far too huge to be classed as an arena-based shooter. Add in a healthy injection of humour and *Smash TV* remains a timeless classic.



Star Control

YEAR RELEASED: 1990
NOTABLE ADDITIONS TO GENRE: DIFFERENT SHIP STRENGTHS, SECONDARY WEAPONS, SCENARIO CREATOR, STRATEGY

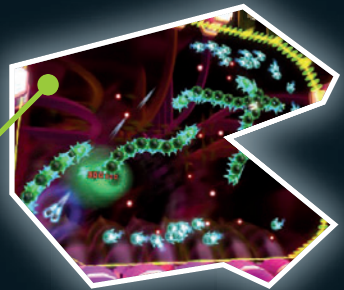
Star Control proved that it was possible to take existing games – in this case *Archon* and *Spacewar!* – and add so much to them that the new title feels like an entirely different beast. Essentially *Star Control*'s melee mode still pitted two warring ships against each other. The difference here, however, was that each craft featured different statistics that would greatly affect how the vehicles would control. Then there was the fact that, in addition to their standard cannons, they all boasted unique secondary weapons. Add in an interesting back story and a huge strategy map and *Star Control*'s place here is assured.



Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved 2

YEAR RELEASED: 2008
NOTABLE ADDITIONS TO GENRE:
MINI-GAMES

Stephen Cakebread is awesome. *Mutant Storm* may well have paved the way, but it's Cakebread's excellent *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved 2* that has become the poster child of both Live Arcade and the arena-based shooter in general. Keeping with *Geometry Wars*' retina-scorching visuals, *Retro Evolved 2* adds some truly excellent mini-games, as well as clever online leaderboards, to create the best arena-based shooter we have ever played. No really. Twin-stick, multidirectional shooters are everywhere now, and while many of them have tried interesting variations on the core concepts, nothing is as well rounded or simply offers as excellent value for money as this outstanding gem.



Mutant Storm

YEAR RELEASED: 2002
NOTABLE ADDITIONS TO GENRE: ONLINE LEADERBOARDS, BEING A TRAILBLAZER

PomPom Games' *Mutant Storm* is an unusual addition here, for unlike many of the included games it didn't bring much evolution to the genre. In fact, after scratching our heads really hard, the only thing we can think of is the inclusion of online leaderboards, making this a first for a commercial release.

Nevertheless, despite its seemingly unimportant addition here, it was responsible for effectively reviving interest in twin-stick arena shooters, and it can't be a coincidence that within a year of its release Steven Cakebread's excellent *Geometry Wars* appeared as an Easter egg in Bizarre Creations' *Project Gotham Racing 2*. A new era for the long-dormant shooter was beginning, and it's all thanks to PomPom Games.

Other worthy games to consider

SOLAR QUEST
Year Released: 1981
Destroy enemy ships with either cannon fire or a nuke for multiple foes and rescue survivors before they're sucked into the sun.

ARCHON: THE LIGHT AND THE DARK **Year Released:** 1983
Interesting take on the genre as the main game features a chess-style board. Once characters collide with each other it features arena-based combat.

KRULL
Year Released: 1983
Seemingly the first arena-based shooter to be based on a film licence. In this case, the rather naff *Krull*.

BLASTEROIDS
Year Released: 1987
Asteroids sequel that added a second player, branching levels, huge bosses, the ability to dock your ship and even allowed you to morph your craft.

LLAMATRON
Year Released: 1991
Introduced the shareware payment model to the genre, as well as Llamas.

SANVEIN
Year Released: 2000
Interesting take on the genre that increases your power-ups based on the number of adjoining rooms that you've cleared. Ship customisation is also available.

BLAST ARENA ADVANCED
Year Released: 2006
Excellent Game Boy Advance title by Matthew Carr that has you collecting flanges while desperately avoiding cluster bombs and their deadly shrapnel. Utter genius.

FRAXY
Year Released: 2007
Solid homebrew effort that looks fantastic, features a level editor and is basically one giant boss rush. Great fun.

EVERYDAY SHOOTER
Year Released: 2007
A truly beautiful fusion of hardcore blasting and soothing guitar riffs. A nice touch is how destroyed enemies add to the overall music track.

EXCEPTION CONFLICT
Year Released: 2009
Mental homebrew mini-game follow-up to *Exception* that features everything from a *Gears Of War 2*-style Horde mode to deathmatches and a *Team Fortress* offering.

If there's one thing we've learned about retro gaming it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…



- » **SYSTEM:** AMSTRAD CPC
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **PUBLISHER:** TARGET GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** MYTHOS GAMES



LASER SQUAD

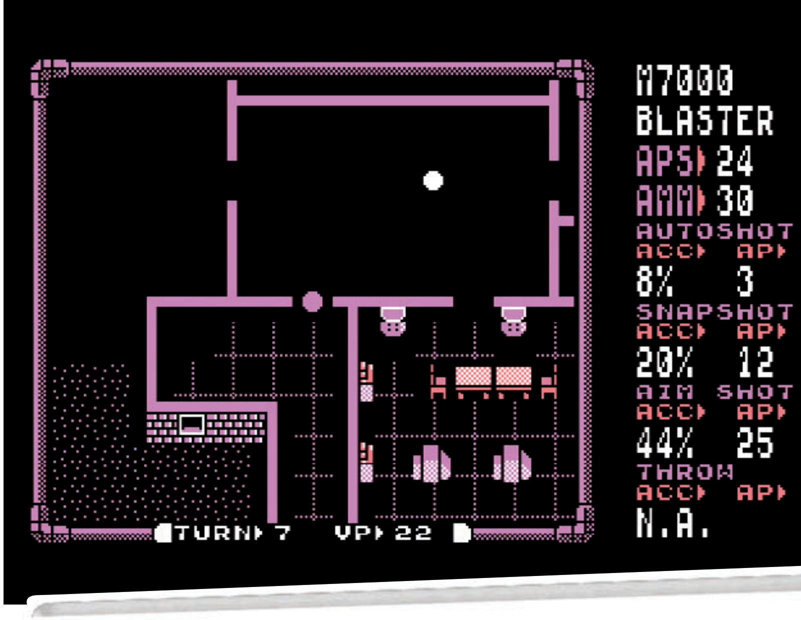
War games will get the trigger-finger twitching and stir the loins of any red-blooded male? Gamers today may be blessed with more 'war porn' than we can throw grenades at, but when Julian Gollop designed Laser Squad for Spectrum and Commodore 64 in 1988, he so successfully expanded the ideas in his Rebelstar series – mixing violence and tactics – that the influence of this sci-fi slice of fun continues to be felt.

Laser Squad, without which we might never have seen the likes of *X-Com* or *Silent Storm*, helped pioneer the turn-based, unit-level war game, and it became clear from the start that this was no ordinary romp. The one-to-one combat of rebel space marines and the sheer exhilaration of fragging your opponents ensured that, whether you were playing against the computer or a friend, you were in for a totally addictive blast.

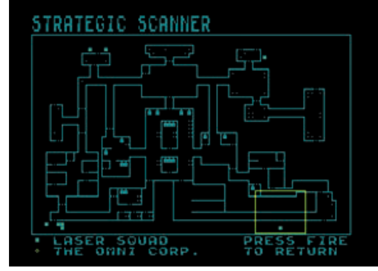
Sometimes **Retro Gamer** gets accused of a CPC bias, but the Amstrad version of *Laser Squad* was arguably the best. Indeed, many certainly acknowledge it as the finest CPC game of all time, and right from the first mission, in which you controlled a group of former employees of weapons manufacturer Marsec in pursuit of its repressive and underhand boss, Sterner Regnix, you were able to bear witness to an almost flawless offering. One that *Amstrad Action*, incidentally, awarded 91 per cent.

Each of the detailed and intriguing missions – there were five, and an expansion pack released in 1990 added two more – followed the same method of play. You had a set number of action points, and when it was your turn to play, you used these to carry out all manner of functions. Action points were used when you walked, opened a door, fired a weapon or carried out one of a number of other tasks. When each of your units used up all of their action points, you could end your turn and allow your opponent to play. The first to bag 100 victory points won.

Once you were in sight of an enemy – the 'scanner' option did not show opponents until they were in your field of vision, which added hugely to the strategy employed



» [Amstrad] Certain death is in sight as the opponent clocks your position.







in the game – you could shoot. But you often had to rely on luck. If you didn't have more action points than your opponent, for instance, then you were unable to use the game's opportunity fire and the element of surprise was lost. It was frustrating enough when you were playing against the computer, but when up against a mate, the inevitable put-downs as you were blasted to smithereens was a harder pill to swallow.

But it always had that one-more-go factor, something it retains while playing today. The simplicity of the screens ensured that, despite the involving nature of the game, it wasn't too hard to pick up, but even when you're alone, the levels of difficulty – from one to four on the original five missions and upto seven on the expansion modules – would challenge the most hardcore gamers. The sheer variety of ways to approach the game ensured that there was enough incentive to keep going back. And 20 years on, we're still returning.

BOSS/RUSH

WHERE WE SQUARE OFF AGAINST THAT END-OF-LEVEL BADDIE FROM YESTERYEAR...

ANDROSS



GAME INFO



» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **DEVELOPER:** ARGONAUT GAMES

The climax of *Star Fox* (or *Star Wing* if you are playing it in the UK) has one of the most memorable final bosses to ever grace the Super Nintendo. The concluding battle with Andross is so unlike anything you've likely seen before (unless you've played Atari's *I, Robot* – but more on that a little later) that upon finishing the game your first reaction was probably to replay it so you could appreciate the sheer awesomeness of the final battle properly.

Having battled through a fleet of three-dimensional enemy spacecraft and various worlds named after rides at Alton Towers, Fox McCloud, leader of a band of anthropomorphic space pilots known as Star Fox, faces his nemesis in a climactic showdown on the planet Venom, the desolate junk planet to which that former Cornerian Army scientist Andross is exiled after one of his dodgy experiments destroys a portion of Corneria City.

Initially taking the form of a giant floating polygonal head with orangey-red eyes, or a bit of floating Cubism, Andross's main attack sees him hovering around the screen sucking up any space debris that strays perilously close to his mouth. Get your ship, the Arwing, caught inside these sudden intakes of air and it's curtains for the player. To dispel this first form, you must aim your laser beams at his eyes. Once blinded, Andross then turns into a weird spinning cube adorned with pictures of his face, which resembles *Planet Of The Apes* antagonist Dr Zaius, who, coincidentally, also happened to be a crazed scientist.

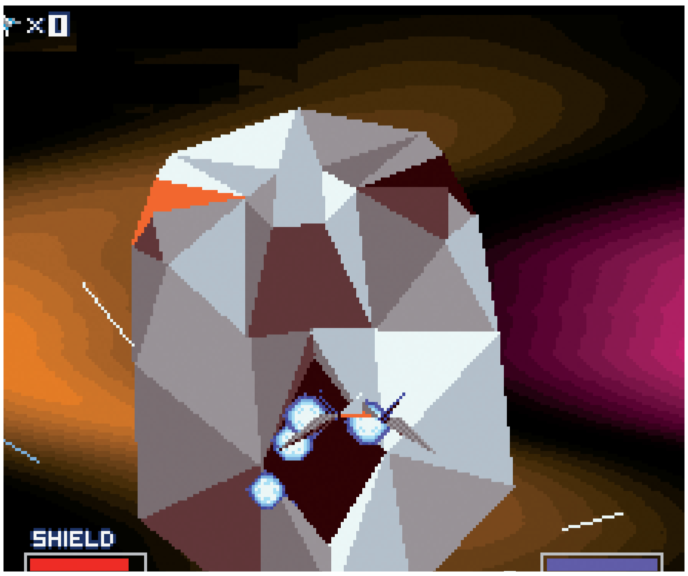
This two-stage attack has been a motif for the boss throughout the *Star Fox* series. In *Star Fox 64* you face Andross in a similar face-off. This time, however, instead of taking the shape of a giant asthmatic head, the sycophantic overlord builds a giant weapon-spaceship thingy of himself, complete with an annoying pair of Mickey Mouse gloves with which to smash your Arwing apart. As before, after a few timely laser blasts at his flashing weak spots – this time on the inside of his gloves – the tacky ape prosthetic soon falls away to reveal his second form – a floating brain. *Star Fox Adventures* on GameCube marked the third and final appearance of Andross in the *Star Fox* series, where he looked and attacked very similar to his Nintendo 64 manifestation.

While many believed Andross's reign of terror was over following Star Fox's GameCube outing, a cloud of mystery soon shrouded his demise following the release of *Star Fox Command* on DS. The Andross's Legacy stage suggests that Andross could be alive on the planet Titania, but no actual physical appearance in *Star Fox Command* – other than a ghostly apparition in the game, which kind of indicates otherwise – actually supports this thinking.

Oh yeah, we almost forgot *I, Robot*. Well, those familiar with Atari's classic game may recall that Andross's first form in *Star Fox* looks remarkably similar to Big Brother from the classic polygon space shoot-'em-up. We've even taken the liberty of including a screenshot of said boss to show off their startling similarities. Was Andross trying to ape a homage to an Atari classic? It's likely. Well, he is a monkey (oh dear – Ed).



» [Arcade] Here's a snap of Big Brother from arcade game *I, Robot*. Was this the inspiration for Andross?

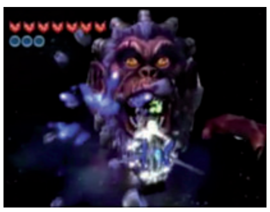


» [SNES] First Donkey Kong and now Andross. Nintendo clearly has some kind of hatred for monkeys or something.

"THE CONCLUDING BATTLE WITH ANDROSS IS SO AWESOME THAT UPON FINISHING THE GAME YOUR FIRST REACTION WAS PROBABLY TO REPLAY IT"



» [N64] Andross returned to terrorise Star Fox for N64 sequel *Lylat Wars*. Who didn't see that one coming?



» [GameCube] Andross returned for the finale of *Star Fox Adventures* in an ending with a twist.



» [SNES] Take the harder course through Star Fox and Andross's first form looks like this… er cow?

game.com

MUCH IS WRITTEN ABOUT THE WINNERS OF EACH GENERATION'S CONSOLE WARS. BUT WHAT OF THE LOSERS? THEY, TOO, HAVE EQUALLY INTERESTING STORIES AND DESERVE A PAGE IN THE HISTORY BOOKS. WITH THAT IN MIND, ASHLEY DAY LOOKS AT ONE OF THE GAME INDUSTRY'S BIGGEST LOSERS

From 1989 to 2009, 20 years of handheld videogame history has been defined by one simple truth: no one can stop Nintendo. Great industry legends like Atari, Sega, Sony and SNK have all tried over the years and all failed to scale the same heights as either the Game Boy or the DS. The story of the Tiger Game.com is no different.

Timing is one of the most important factors in any product launch, and Tiger Electronics must have considered September 1997 as its own window of opportunity for the handheld videogame market. By that time, Nintendo's Game Boy was eight years old and looking a little long in the tooth, while its main competitors, the Atari Lynx and Sega Game Gear, had died off a couple of years previously. There was an opening in the market and Tiger, a Western company with extensive experience in electronic games, was poised to take advantage.

For many years previously, Tiger Electronics had enjoyed great success in the toy market with its pocket LCD games, which offered simple but fun distractions on the go. And just as Nintendo took what it had learned with Game & Watch and transformed it into an interchangeable cartridge system, Tiger looked to do the same with its own handhelds.

Dubbed Game.com (with a silent dot), Tiger's handheld was named to take advantage of the explosion in popularity of the internet at the time and hoped to create an association with cutting-edge technology that would leave the Game Boy looking outdated by comparison. Pitched somewhere between a PDA and a games machine, it offered potential



users both serious applications and play, with some truly innovative features. The most obvious of these was the touch screen and stylus, which was way ahead of its time some seven years before the launch of the DS. The system also boasted on-board memory with four built-in pieces of software comprising a calendar, calculator, phone book and solitaire game, all of which used stylus control. In addition, the unit featured the unusual addition of two cartridge ports that could be switched between without powering down, and the enticing promise of online functionality with separately sold software.

When it came to games, Tiger knew it couldn't compete with the *Marios* and *Zeldas* of Nintendo's world, so wisely decided to play to its own strengths by leveraging its own intellectual properties and publisher relationships. Its own line of handheld games as well as its experience of licensed properties meant that it could create a wealth of software based on instantly recognisable names, as demonstrated by its two pack-in titles: movie licence *Batman & Robin* and *Lights Out*, an adaptation of one of Tiger's most popular handheld games.

In terms of specifications, the Game.com was a mixed bag. Its monochrome screen was outdated and suffered from blurriness, while the reliance on four AA batteries was less than economical, but there was some impressive hardware to be found under the casing. The Game.com's processing chip was a proprietary Sharp SM8502 that handled every function of the portable, including sound, visuals and touch-screen input, and was, according to Tiger's contracted game programmer, Thomas Fessler, capable of performance speeds up to eight times faster than the Game Boy's Zilog Z80 CPU.

"The major advantage to this design," says Game.com homebrew enthusiast Jason Oster, "is that the hardware was much less complex, and therefore easier to manufacture at a reduced cost." Furthermore, each game cartridge could be up to 16 megabits in size compared to the Game Boy's maximum of 12 megabits, while the screen offered five shades of grey in comparison to the Game Boy's four. Oster adds: "Game.com's proprietary MCU, the Sharp SM8502, had limited support for PCM wave output, which made it good at speech sampling," which Tiger proudly boasted on the box and was easily heard, along with some excellent chip music, in many Game.com games.

"Overall, from a developer's standpoint, Game.com is a very powerful



SPECIFICATIONS

Year released: 1997

Original price: $69.95

Main Processor: Sharp SM8502 MCU

Dimensions: 190x108x19mm

Screen: 192x160 resolution, 12x10 grid touch sensor

Colours: Five shades of grey

Sound: 8-bit PCM and FM synthesis



INSTANT EXPERT

The dot in '.com' is silent. So Game.com is actually pronounced 'Game com' in speech.

The Game.com pioneered many features. It was the first handheld games console to have a touch screen, internet capabilities and two cartridge slots.

It remains the only handheld to feature two cartridge slots. Although Nintendo's DSi prototype had two, it decided to remove one to keep the unit size down.

Despite its failure, Tiger's Game.com was not the last monochrome handheld released. SNK's Neo Geo Pocket followed in 1998 and the Bandai WonderSwan came in 1999. Both featured black-and-white screens before being hastily relaunched in colour in the wake of the Game Boy Color.

Footage of the abandoned *Metal Gear Solid* port was reportedly distributed to alt.games.video.tiger.game-com users in 1998, but neither screens nor the video have materialised since.

Future retro collectors be warned: the Game.com's internal calendar will only work up until December 2099. It's like the millennium bug all over again, except no one will care this time.

Search Hasbro's website and you'll find that it still has PDFs for a few Game.com game manuals available.

The Game.com Pocket Pro was briefly re-issued minus the front-lit screen and available in four different colour casings.

The console was actually Tiger's second handheld after the R-Zone – a unit similar to the Virtual Boy that projected LCD images onto a mirror to create a hologram effect.

Retro Gamer's sub editor, Olly, was actually given a Game.com in the Nineties and was (un)lucky enough to experience the internet cart first-hand.



"The monochrome screen was outdated and blurry, but there was some impressive hardware under the casing"

machine," claimed Fessler in a 1998 internet chat. "But with all new systems, it takes time for developers to learn how to use it to its fullest potential," a fact that was brutally apparent from day one. Pack-in game *Batman & Robin* looked brilliant on paper. It had huge sprites, detailed backgrounds and arcade-style action, but the poor refresh rate of the LCD screen meant that the game was reduced to a blurry mess as soon as anything moved. *Lights Out*, the second pack-in, was a puzzle game with zero animation and consequently didn't suffer from the same display problems. This presented Game.com developers with a real dilemma. Should they make impressive-looking games that would look brilliant on the back of the box but ultimately disappoint the buyer once they played the thing, or should they play to the handheld's strengths and produce simple but playable games that don't as easily jump off the shelves? It would take Tiger well over a year to find the answer, at huge cost to the Game.com's credibility.

Hardware capabilities weren't the only problems facing Tiger, either, as the company found its previous success in LCD games had become as much a curse as a blessing. In a letter posted at the alt.games.video.tiger.game-com newsgroup on 17 June 1998, Tiger directly addressed its fans' concerns over the availability of games with the following explanation: "Game.com has had a tough time establishing a strong presence at retail. This is largely because it originates from Tiger, which is a toy company, not a videogame company per se. As a result, many retailers have chosen to merchandise Game.com as a toy – not as the strong vid game system it is. Because Tiger's traditional toys don't come in 'multiple parts' (such as a system and carts), retailers haven't been mindful of the big picture, and carts have tended to languish in distribution centres instead of making their way to store shelves next to hardware."

Tiger's decision to develop every Game.com title in-house had also proved something of a double-edged sword. Without third-party support, the catalogue of software would be severely limited, but Tiger hoped to offset this by licensing properties from other publishers. As well as working with recognisable movie and TV IPs, Tiger also established deals with the likes of Sega and Capcom so that it could produce its own versions of popular Saturn and PlayStation games like *Fighters Megamix* and *Resident Evil 2*. Licences gained for Tiger's standalone LCD handhelds also proved invaluable, as the rights to create games based on Sega's *Sonic* property allowed Tiger to produce *Sonic Jam* for the Game.com without too much legal difficulty. The insistence on developing everything in-house or with contracted staff, however, slowed down production of new games significantly, and many titles suffered painful delays while the most





» Modems, power supplies and link cables were all available put so poorly stocked that many believed they never existed.





DotCom.com

The Game.com, rather confusingly, had two cartridges that enabled online functionality. Here's the difference: the first, known as the Internet Cart, granted access to the web as long as you connected the machine to an external modem. Functionality was limited, however, as it would only work with text-based ISPs and websites. AOL, America's most popular ISP at the time, was totally incompatible. The second cart was known as Web Link and actually allowed you to connect your Game.com to a PC and transfer data between the two. If the PC was connected to the net then you could upload your high scores to Tiger's website for all to see or download exclusive cheat modes for certain games. Game.com fan Steven Cox recalls the difficulty of using the device: "The Web Link cartridge was not user-friendly at all. A fun toy for tech geeks like myself, but I can only imagine how many kids picked one up – well, probably not that many kids – and outright failed to make it work with their dial-up ISP." Online play was never enabled, but a Tiger representative did once say that it was trying to get it to work by using a slow game, like an RPG, while also improving the transfer rate of the carts. Sadly, the Game.com's commercial life came to an end before such experiments bore fruit.





» A photo from 3D Realms' website shows the size of *Duke Nukem 3D*'s cartridge in comparison to the N64 version.



» [Game.Com] The Game.com's GUI gave instant access to all the in-built features and any cartridges that were inserted.

hotly anticipated games like *Castlevania* and *Metal Gear Solid* never made it to shelves. Movie and TV licences also proved troublesome, as Tiger had to occasionally work to the inconvenient schedules of external companies. An *X-Files* game, for example, was planned at one stage, but Fox requested that development of the game be postponed until the movie was complete, by which time Tiger had moved on and it was never finished. Likewise, a planned *Godzilla* game was abandoned following a licensing dispute that pulled the rights away from all of Tiger's toy divisions. The Game.com catalogue, it seemed, could be damaged by association with Tiger's portfolio as well as benefit from it.

If business was a struggle for Tiger in 1997, then 1998 was a true hardship. This was the year that Nintendo fought back – and in typically aggressive style. The Game Boy Color was launched and though it was technically inferior to the Game.com, its colour screen and exemplary refresh rate made it much more palatable to consumers. And let's not forget the worldwide release of *Pokémon* that year, which created a media phenomenon and even helped the humble black-and-white Game Boy to enjoy a second lease of life.

Tiger Electronics needed to improve the Game.com and quickly, and at E3 that year it announced the Game.com Pocket Pro, a hardware variation that it hoped would keep the business going. The Pocket Pro improved on the original model by reducing the required number of batteries from four to two, reducing the size and weight of the device at the cost of one cartridge slot, and adding a new front-lit screen with a far better refresh rate, comparable to that of the excellent Game Boy Pocket. Tiger also announced its first original IP for the Game.com, an RPG called *Mutoids* that was said to play like *Pokémon* and would allow Game.com owners to link up and do battle with each other and even link up to a new line of electronic keychain games called *Mutoid Giga Fighters* – a particularly innovative way for Tiger to take advantage of its diverse toy range to help boost the Game.com's potential.

Not only was *Mutoids* a smart way to compete with the *Pokémon* boom, but it was also an experienced solution to the Game.com's performance problems – a killer app that, as an RPG, didn't have too much animation and therefore didn't cause the screen to blur during critical moments. It had taken a while, but Tiger was finally learning which games worked best on the system and which didn't, and you could see the results in the later batch of releases. *Resident Evil 2* may have been an ambitious conversion, but it was also a much slower-paced game than your average action title, and its lumbering zombie enemies were perfect for the Game.com's motion-averse screen. Tiger was beginning to pick its licences much more carefully with these issues in mind, and later releases like *Monopoly*, *Jeopardy!* and *Frogger* were much better suited, showing that board games, TV shows and retro games could be perfect for the Game.com as long as the brand name was familiar enough to reel customers in.

Sadly, Tiger's refocused strategy was too little and too late to save the Game.com. The Pocket Pro was a marked improvement over the original model, but it still looked pathetic next to the Game Boy Color. Retailers continued to position the device poorly and not stock the full range of software, and specialist games magazines rarely, if ever, covered the system, leading to a critical lack of awareness among core gamers. The reputation of the handheld was still tarnished by the original model and lacklustre launch titles, making consumers reluctant to take a chance on the superior releases of late 1998.

Another problem was that Tiger failed to capitalise on many of the handheld's real selling points. With the exception of *Solitaire*, the in-built software was too basic or not useful enough when compared to proper PDA devices, while the machine's internet capabilities never came close to reaching their exciting potential (see 'DotCom.com'). And from a game design perspective, it was disheartening to see Tiger waste the



» *Small Soldiers* was announced for the Game.com but never released. Only this background shot and a couple of character models remain.

Only 20 games were ever released for the Game.com, and although most were junk, a **small minority** is worthy of note

01. FROGGER
A great classic arcade game that's almost done brilliantly on the Game.com. Only the blurry snakes let the conversion down.

02. BATMAN & ROBIN
Standard platform/action fare based on the terrible George Clooney movie. The action's good, but the visuals are so blurry that it borders on pointless.

03. CENTIPEDE
A crisp and clean remake of the arcade original. Not entirely faithful, but just as much fun to play. One of the better score-attack games out there.

04. DUKE NUKEM 3D
This isn't quite the FPS it appears to be in stills. The game moves along one tile at a time, like *3D Monster Maze*, and you can't really aim the gun.

05. FIGHTERS MEGAMIX
Lacks the full complement of characters as seen in the Saturn original. And if the full move list is there, it's impossible to pull off.

06. INDY 500
A "3D" racing game that has more in common with a simple LCD game than anything on consoles. Great speech, poor gameplay.

07. JEOPARDY!
This classic TV show should work great on the Game.com, but there usually isn't enough time to tap the answers in on the touch screen.

08. THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK
An action-adventure game with multiple gameplay modes, including driving, platform and so on. The objectives are often confusing and the graphics suffer from blur.

09. HENRY
Henry is a 'concentration'- based solitaire game with a twist. Instead of matching cards with pictures, you match audible sounds. A great idea, done well.

10. MORTAL KOMBAT TRILOGY
It might suffer from the blurs, but *MK Trilogy* does at least play well and has loads of features. It's miles better than any *Mortal Kombat* on the Game Boy, too.

11. MONOPOLY
The board game's turn-based gameplay and simple animations are well suited to the Game.com, but a standard game can drag on longer than some batteries last.

12. QUIZ WIZ: CYBER TRIVIA
A *Trivial Pursuit*-style quiz game with its own virtual host. Falls flat due to boring questions and the annoying, unfunny host. *Buzz*, this ain't.

13. SCRABBLE
Another game that should work great on the Game.com and… actually does. The touch screen is used especially well for moving tiles.

14. SONIC JAM
Four great Mega Drive games on one cartridge should be reason to celebrate, but *Sonic*'s speed and the Game.com's blurry screen do not make good bedfellows.

15. RESIDENT EVIL 2
It shouldn't work, but it really does. Not an accurate adaptation, but as close as you could get in 1998 and something that the Game Boy never managed to do.

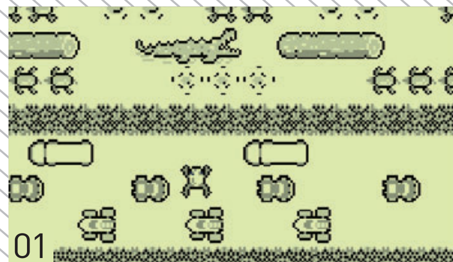
16. TIGER CASINO
Great presentation and good controls make this gambling compendium a solid release, but the subject matter is hardly the most inspiring content.

17. WHEEL OF FORTUNE
A good example of a 'does what it says on the tin' game. The quiz show translates well and is just as fun/boring as you'd expect.

18. WHEEL OF FORTUNE 2
The only sequel to a Game.com title! This one doesn't really make any improvements; it just adds more puzzles to extend the lifespan.

19. WILLIAMS ARCADE CLASSICS
Joust, Defender, Robotron 2084, *Sinistar* and *Defender II* all appear in this mixed bag. *Robotron* is the best, while *Sinistar* is unplayable.

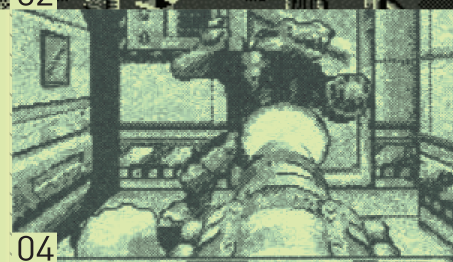
20. LIGHTS OUT
This timeless puzzler translates perfectly to the Game.com touch screen, but the puzzles' difficulty soon hits a brick wall. Too hard.


01



02


03


04

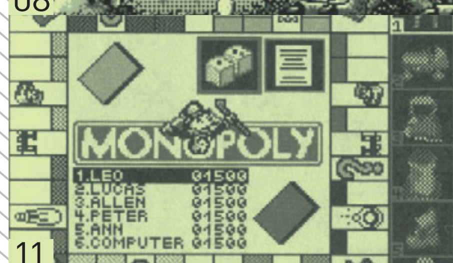

05



07


08


10



11



14


15



16



17



19



» The Game.com Pocket Pro was smaller and featured a better screen, but it was too little and too late to save the day.

"High-profile cancellations left the Game.com with more exciting games left on the scrap heap than on store shelves"

potential of the touch screen by failing to make use of it in all but the most simple puzzle games, although some gamers, like Steven Cox, webmaster of a popular Game.com fan site in 1998, sympathise with Tiger on this particular issue. "Nintendo right now must force game developers to develop for the DS touch screen. It's simply easier for developers to follow the tried-and-true control pad paradigm," he argues. "Tiger Electronics was at least doing its stuff in-house, but even then I think there was a large conceptual wall to hurdle to get the developers to think in terms of the touch-screen interface. Porting their puzzle games over was surely easy, but what does the touch screen bring to games like the *Batman & Robin* movie property? It's a neat feature that ultimately looks better as a PR selling point than an actual gameplay addition."

Worst of all, many of the upcoming games failed to emerge from within Tiger's walls. Promising new games like *A Bug's Life*, *Small Soldiers*, *NBA Hangtime*, *Shadow Madness*, *Madden Football '98* and *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* were all cancelled in addition to the previously mentioned *X-Files*, *Godzilla*, *Castlevania* and *Metal Gear Solid*, leaving the Game.com with more exciting games left on the scrap heap than on store shelves. And the final nail in the coffin for the few fans still left hanging on to their Game.coms was the cancellation of *Mutoids*, the only title that realistically stood a chance of saving the system.

Tiger Electronics quickly moved on. The company had recently been acquired by Hasbro and had a phenomenon to call its own in the form of the increasingly popular Furby toys. Development of new Game.com titles was eventually ceased, and although the company continued to stock surplus units of the system on its online store for some time, the handheld was officially discontinued in 2000.

Only 20 games were ever released for the Game.com, and the handheld remains one of the most unarguable failures in gaming history nearly a decade on. Boxed Game.com systems and sealed games are easily available on eBay at extremely low prices, and the system doesn't even enjoy the cult status afforded to other doomed handhelds like the Neo Geo Pocket or Bandai WonderSwan.

In terms of the after-market scene, the Game.com barely registers a faint blip on the radar, but there are a small number of individuals hoping to kick-start an online community for the handheld in the next few years. Hacker and homebrew programmer Jason Oster was lucky enough to acquire an official Game.com development kit a few years ago and has made some progress in both emulation and homebrew development. "The development kit hardware is basically just an EPROM emulator," he says. "It connects to a PC through the now-outdated ISA slot. A Game.com cartridge ROM can then be uploaded to the emulator using a DOS program. And the modified Game.com can run it just like any other cartridge. One of the better finds in the development kit was a full-featured software emulator that can run and debug any of the Game.com game ROMs on a Windows PC. We were able to hack the emulator to discover so much previously unknown information about the MCU. Eventually, I released some of that info as part of an open-source assembler project for homebrew Game.com development."

"The emulator in the dev kit is great," Oster continues. "It's almost 100 per cent perfect. And you can actually see what you are doing in games, with an extremely high contrast and no blur. One of our members was working on Game.com support in MESS [Multiple Emulator Super System], but I'm not sure how far along he got with it. The MCU is pretty well-documented now, but fine details still need to be sorted. I think to really do that well, some homebrew demos need to be made and run on the hardware. The assembler, code-named 'as85', was the first assembler I ever wrote and it's an essential piece of software for writing homebrew Game.com code. It just needs to be worked on a bit more until it's in a usable state, and then the real hacking and development can begin."

For regular gamers, however, the Game.com remains little more than a footnote in the history of videogames at worst, and a particularly relevant lesson in the difficulties of the handheld games market at best. For Steven Cox, whose Game.com now sits boxed up under his desk with his Lynx, Game Boy and C64, Tiger's handheld is a reminder of just how turbulent and open to change the game industry really is.

"If a little company like Tiger can make a go at it then the market is much more malleable than we often think," he argues. "Remember, it wasn't too long ago that industry analysts were laughing at Sony for daring to take on console giants Sega and Nintendo, and a single generation later the same analysts laughing at Microsoft for daring to take on Sony. The gaming market is a strange place and Game.com is part of its history".



SWITCHBLADE

SHARP, SHINY AND A CUT ABOVE THE REST



- » **PUBLISHER:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **GENRE:** ACTION PLATFORMER
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SPECTRUM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



HISTORY

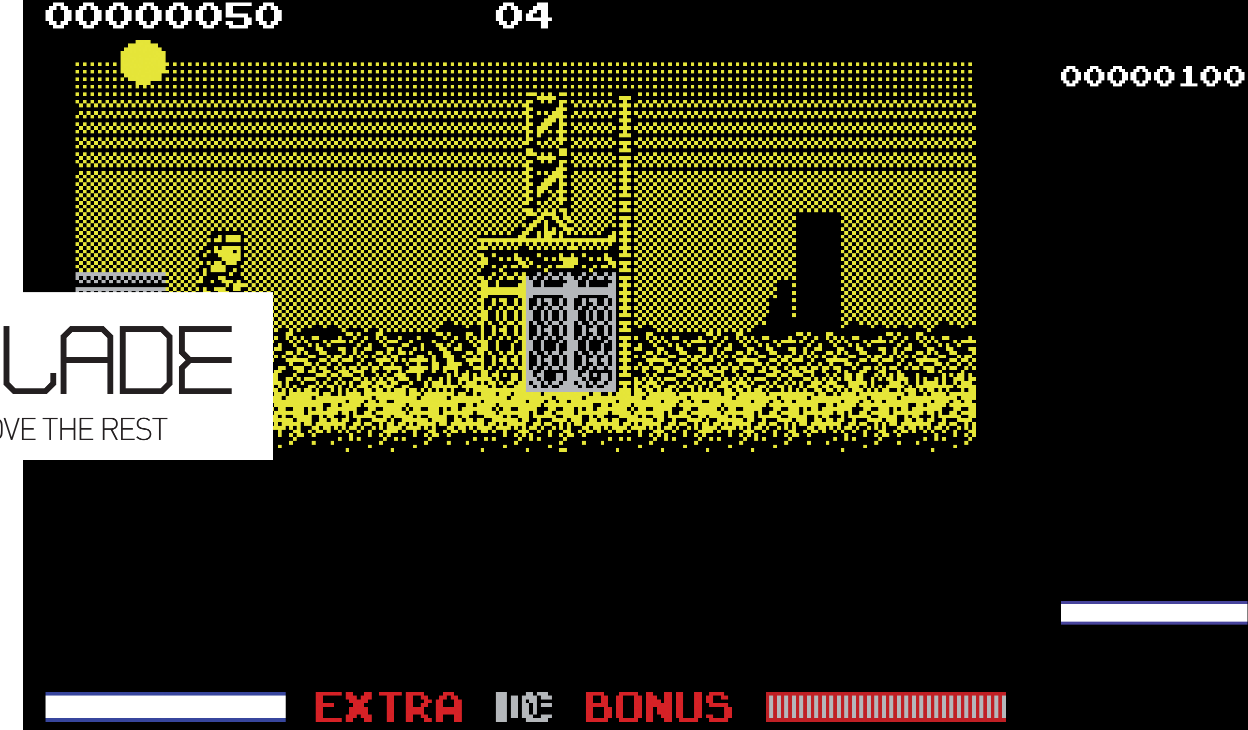
When I first spied *Switchblade* in my local computer game store, I knew it was akin to finding my very own Megan Fox stuffed inside the belly of a sofa. The graphics were gritty, the gameplay smacked of classic arcade run-and-gun action, and the front cover showed a guy gearing up to stick the business end of a shank into a metal lizard – all elements that told me this was something I needed in my life immediately. So, I handed over my cash to the chap behind the counter and trotted home, anxious to boot up the game and have my mind well and truly blown.

Created and developed by Simon Phipps, the brain behind *Rick Dangerous* and *Wolfchild*, *Switchblade* certainly didn't disappoint. It was made for Atari ST in 1989, and later ported to the Amiga, C64, Amstrad and Speccy. From the moment I saw its cinematic intro I was hooked.

Switchblade's hero, Hiro, was tasked with venturing through a seemingly infinite number of underground caverns to retrieve 16 scattered parts of a sacred and powerful artefact called Fireblade. The gameplay was a nice mix of platform, exploration and side-scrolling beat-'em-up, all wrapped up into one good-looking package – one inspired by Japanese animation and post-apocalyptic cinema.

The most memorable elements of *Switchblade* were its scale and length, and its unusual but perfectly workable combat system. Unlike conventional side-scrolling fighters – in which you simply stab at the fire button to make your character do the same on screen, or do so in tandem with a joystick push – *Switchblade* added a chargeable power meter that allowed the player to hold down the fire button and unleash a concentrated kick so powerful it could smash brick walls and enemy faces as if they were constructed out of wafer.

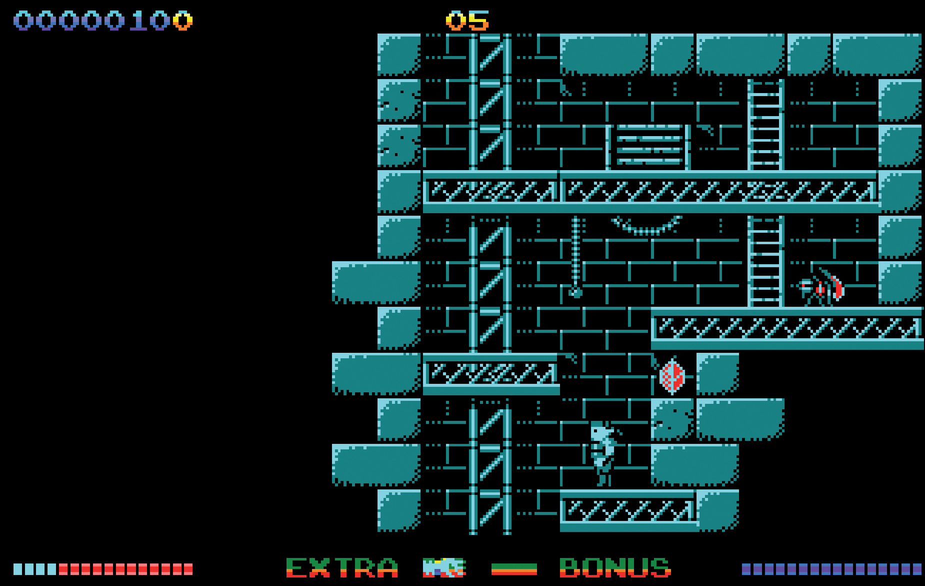
As you've probably gathered, I'm a bit of a fan of Hiro's sword-reclamation adventure. It struck a chord with me back in the day. The mix of platformer and atmospheric run-and-gun game felt remarkably fresh for its day.

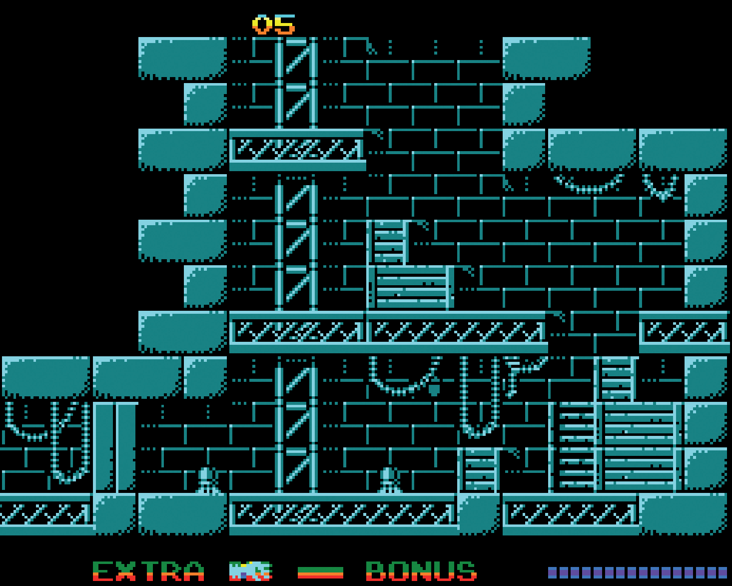







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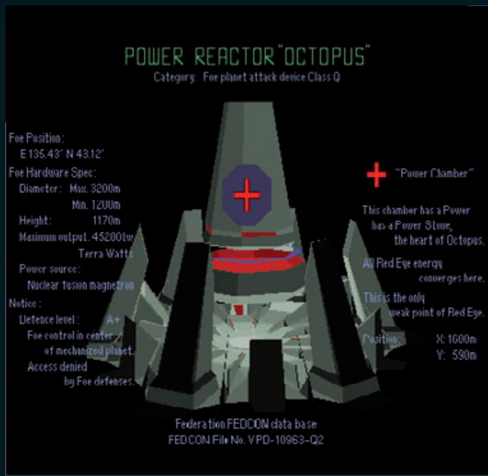
THE MAKING OF...

STARBLADE

Jonti Davies meets Starblade director **Hajime Nakatani** to relive an under-appreciated 3D sci-fi blast from the turn of the Nineties



» [Arcade] It may look rather bland and simplistic now, but *Starblade*'s visuals were absolutely cutting edge back in the day.



» [Arcade] Whenever you're due to take on a huge boss you'll be given some handy information about them, And a possible clue to their weak point.



» [Arcade] 500km away from Redeye and with a whole load of enemies to destroy… You've got your work cut out.

Before, during and after the production of *Starfox* at Nintendo in the early Nineties, Giles Goddard, Dylan Cuthbert and local Japanese members of the game's development team used to spend endless hours at an arcade in Kyoto. They were popping 100-yen coins into the slots of one coin-op almost religiously – that game was Namco's *Starblade*. Its serious sci-fi styling had a clear influence on the direction of the first Super FX game, and it's no coincidence that a decade later NCL would entrust Namco with the development of a GameCube title in what had, by then, become the *Starfox* series.

With the company's *Galaga*-accelerated space shoot-'em-up heritage providing some of the impetus, the turn of the Nineties saw Namco emboldened to take a radical approach when producing its first generation of LaserDisc arcade shooters. The leap from 1987's *Galaga '88* to the next game in the series was phenomenal. The new borderline virtual reality assault began with 1990's *Galaxian³*, which explored the final frontier in a genuinely futuristic environment created from the ground up by Namco.

The following year's *Starblade* took the company's 3D ambitions in a new direction, driven by the System 21 hardware – yet as far as the Shinagawa-based firm was concerned, its projects back then were symbiotically connected to one another. "*Starblade* was part of a group of three arcade games, along with *Galaxian³* and *Galaxian³ Theater 6*," director Hajime Nakatani explains. "*Galaxian³* we first exhibited in 1990 at the International Garden and Greenery Exposition in Osaka."

Also known as Expo '90, the event Nakatani refers to went on from April through to September of that year in Japan's second city. Namco used this opportunity to show off its latest wonder to an international audience, even though the focus of the event was daffodils and conifers and all things horticultural.

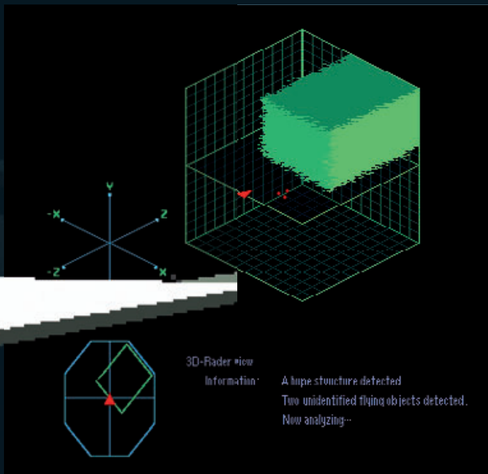
Galaxian³ was hyped as an "active simulator" that large groups of people, up to 28 at a time, could play simultaneously, sharing responsibility for the outcome of the game by virtue of the fact that each player's energy meter contributed to the overall health of the assembled players' collaborative mission. On the inside wall of a huge cylindrical structure, 16 projectors were set up in the centre to beam 120" images out to cloak the walls, forming a colossal 360-degree visual experience. Projectors were used specifically in order to negate the problem of having visible edges and joins when using multiple CRTs; even a

IN THE KNOW

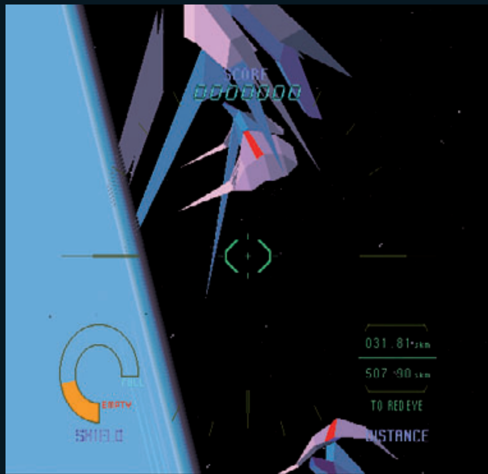
- » **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO
- » **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE, MEGA CD, 3DO, PLAYSTATION
- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5 (PLAYSTATION VERSION)

> **"Starblade was part of a group of three arcade games, along with Galaxian³ and Galaxian³ Theater 6"**
>
> HAJIME NAKATANI ALLUDES TO THE SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NAMCO'S JOURNEYS INTO OUTER SPACE IN THE EARLY NINETIES

» [Arcade] Namco's *Starblade* provided plenty of inspiration for Nintendo's *Starfox*. We're guessing this particular shot didn't, however.



» [Arcade] *Starblade*'s stunning visuals were achieved thanks to Namco's powerful System 21 hardware board.



» [Arcade] Let's do the timewarp… again.



THE MAKING OF... STARBLADE





» *Starblade*'s neat warp effect can be seen in replica throughout *Rez*

Separated at birth (of the universe)?

Playing through *Starblade* today, it's clear just how great an influence it exerted on many of the space shooters that appeared in the following decade. Yet while *Starfox* benefited from some of *Starblade*'s principles, the combination of forward-moving stages with occasional static area-based side-missions being one example, United Game Artists' *Rez* appears to owe a more obvious design debt to Namco's game. That, or it's just pure coincidence that *Starblade*'s hexagonal bevel targets on structures reappear in *Rez*, that its 'shoot the walls down to continue on your course' sequences also return in *Rez*, and that, as this cross-examination of just a few scenes indicates, *Starblade*'s design DNA effectively lived on in 2001.

relatively minor factor such as this would, it was deemed, have been enough to undermine the overall emotional effect of being completely surrounded by the image. Players sat in a circle formation around the core of this building, all looking out to space.

For a time, quite understandably, the *Galaxian³* installation at Expo '90 was the talk of Japan. It appeared on national TV news, and photos from the spookily futuristic inside of the monument were plastered across Japanese newspapers. The entire thing was transported to the Namco Wonder Egg theme park in Tokyo in early 1992, where it remained until the end of 2000. Only one other 28-player version was ever produced, and that stayed at a Namco arcade in Kanagawa prefecture from 1993 until 1997, when the place closed down and the *Galaxian³* machine was broken up before being auctioned off, with the proceeds going to charities. Other six- and sixteen-player types were built for the less extreme demands of medium-sized arcades around Japan. The six-player build was branded *Galaxian³ Theater 6*, the graphics of which were an 'arranged' version of those used in the LD software for the original Expo '90 machine, beamed from just two 120" projectors.

"At first," Nakatani recalls, "we were developing *Galaxian³* purely with the notion in mind that we would display it at Expo '90. We had the hydraulics and 360-degree screen in place, and that was fine," Nakatani relates, alluding to the fact that it could have ended up as little more than a 'sit, stare and wonder' kind of non-interactive CG experience. "But no, we decided to make it an all-purpose attraction – a proper game – and that meant we had to add functions that turned it into an electric type of system where each player could take control of a responsive part of the machine."

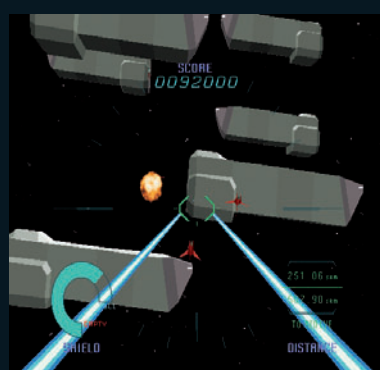


Nakatani says this provided Namco with vital experience that would be drawn upon when working on related future projects: "Taking those lessons on board, we started to plan more compact non-moving variations such as the *Galaxian³ Theater 6* machines and *Starblade*."

For *Starblade*, 3D graphics were created from scratch; there was no reliance on any 'arranged' *Galaxian³* code. The cabinet didn't move in the same sense that the *Galaxian³* attraction moved players to immerse them more fully in the 360-degree vista: instead, like many coin-ops before it, *Starblade* used hydraulics to provide force-feedback linked in to the action on-screen.

More interestingly, *Starblade* used something dubbed by Namco as the 'Infinite Distance Projection' system – Nakatani's "favourite part of the game, no question" – employing concave mirrors in tandem with projectors to achieve a palpable sense of depth in the game's operatic depiction of travel through space. In order to test the mirrors' reflective power, Nakatani's team came up with an ingenious QA method, which involved cooking slivers of beef on a makeshift Korean-style barbecue (known in Japan as yakinikku): "For the Infinite Distance Projection system, we used concave mirrors on the projection screen, but in order to check that those mirrors were constructed to a sufficient level, we took them out into the garden outside Namco's headquarters and used them to condense sunlight. We tried and succeeded in making yakinikku on them. They became that hot!"

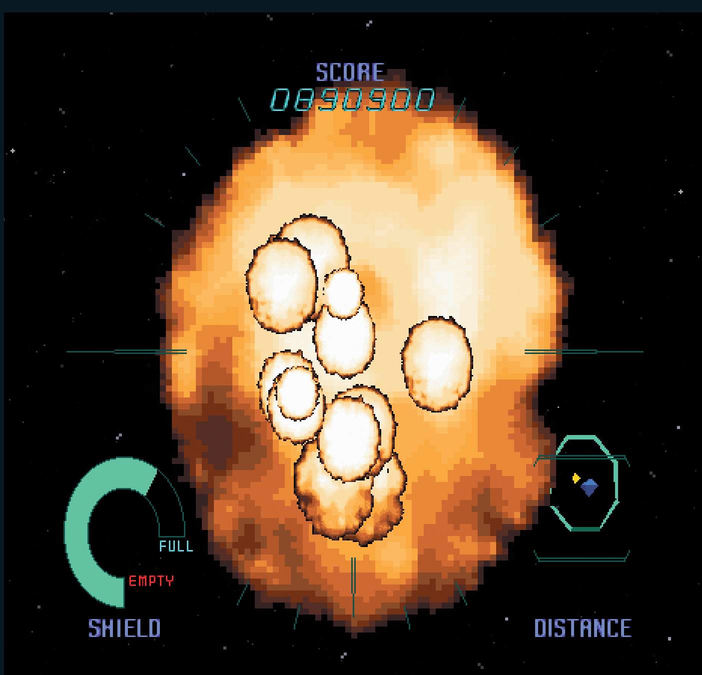
With the sizzling performance of the *Starblade* arcade machines' screens in no doubt, Nakatani and team focused on creating something that was thematically as close to Hollywood sci-fi as possible. "We consulted lots of sci-fi films for inspiration," Nakatani remembers, "but



» [Arcade] Swooping and diving, gliding through superstructures floating in space: the simple joys of *Starblade*.

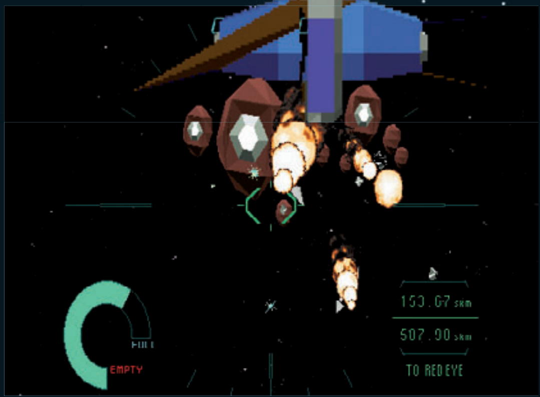


» [Arcade] *Starblade*'s sense of scale is suitably impressive. Just wait until those ships in the distance appear up close.

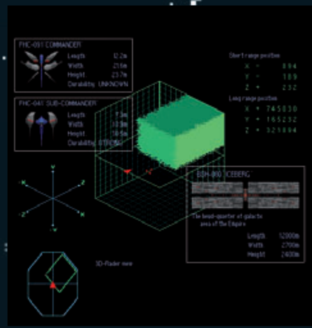


» [Arcade] "Yahoo. You're all clear kid, now let's blow this thing and go home!"





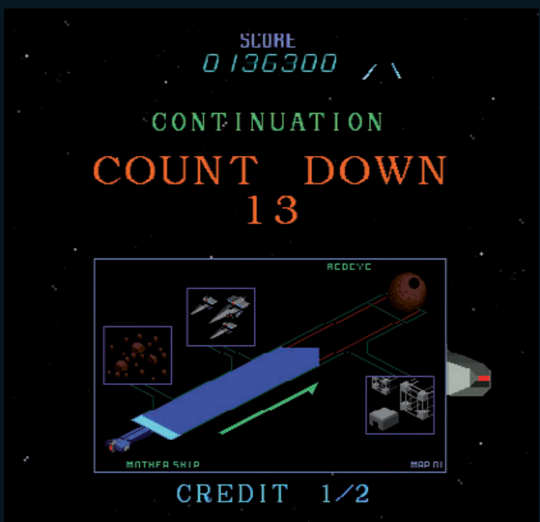
» [Arcade] Many targets were clearly marked with hexagonal bevels.





» [Arcade] Incoming missiles had to be destroyed before they could do any damage, though with four or five often inbound simultaneously that wasn't always easy.





» [Arcade] You may have lost this round, soldier, but you've not lost the war. Especially if you cheat and use infinite continues…

Sequels and comebacks

While in 1991 there was no inclination from the *Starblade* team to produce a sequel, it did receive a quasi-sequel – more of a botched port, really – in the form of PlayStation game *Starblade Alpha*. This, along with the 3DO version, claimed enhancements yet never really got close to emulating the System 21 original. Today, the best option outside of MAME and System 21 emulators is the Japanese Wii's Virtual Console take on the arcade game, which enables Remote cursor-controlled shooting and is available for 800 Points (800 yen). A sequel was eventually developed in 2002 using the PS2-based System 246 hardware, but sadly it was canned.

"Namco was the first company to [use] polygons. Our history of working in 3D was a long one, and we had been researching all kinds of things"

NAKATANI ON ACHIEVING THE KIND OF GRAPHICS SEEN IN STARBLADE

most notably *Star Wars*." Achieving a LucasArts level of CG was naturally not on the agenda, but outstanding polygon-pushing 3D scenes were easily within reach of the *Starblade* team, and Nakatani maintains that producing such a remarkable 3D journey was actually not that difficult.

"Including the people who worked on the design of the cabinet, the electricians and software team, we had about 25 people working on *Starblade*. Development lasted about a year and a half. We were experimenting with a new system and because of that everyone was really into it, wondering how things would work out and what was possible. The whole team was in good spirits. Namco was the first company – or maybe the second – in the whole world to engineer games using 3D polygons. Our history of working in 3D was a long one, and we had been researching all kinds of things."

A significant part of *Starblade*'s appeal was its intriguing use of physical distances in measuring players' progress through its levels. A typical trip would be a 500km expedition from a base to a nearby planet; while movement was pre-programmed and on-rails, the player's responsibility was that of a gunner who shoots down enemies in the ship's flightpath and brings down the occasional power reactor boss. Although there were no alternative routes on successive credits, the game came across like a graceful space ballet – albeit one that was for the most part without music, and instead brought atmospheric sound effects and voice commands to the fore – in which the player was just privileged to have a minor role. Predictable enemy patterns also reduced the game's long-term potential. Yet, in the time between first contact with *Starblade*'s world and the point at which you realised you could foresee every trick before it occurred, the game was a breathtaking journey. Both time and technology concerns meant that *Starblade* could be nothing greater than this.

"We were thinking about letting players control their ships and control the shooting," Nakatani admits, "but as a result of considering how that would affect how the game played, we decided to make the focus of *Starblade* its targeting and shooting features. If we had had more time to work on the project, though, I would have liked to at least attempt ship control and other features. Overall, though, I was completely satisfied with how *Starblade* turned out: we sold as many machines as we were expecting to, and rather than make a sequel we were all in the mood to work on something new, so we went on to new things."

Unfortunately for anyone who missed the game's appearance in arcades during the early Nineties, the 3DO, Mega CD and PlayStation versions of events were nowhere near as well executed as the original coin-op was. For Nakatani, this alone remains a source of regret: "The conversion of *Starblade* to the PlayStation had absolutely no participation from the team that worked on the arcade game. The project was farmed out to another place, and I remember being extremely disappointed by that. I really felt as though I should have had some kind of input with the PlayStation conversion, but it wasn't to be…"

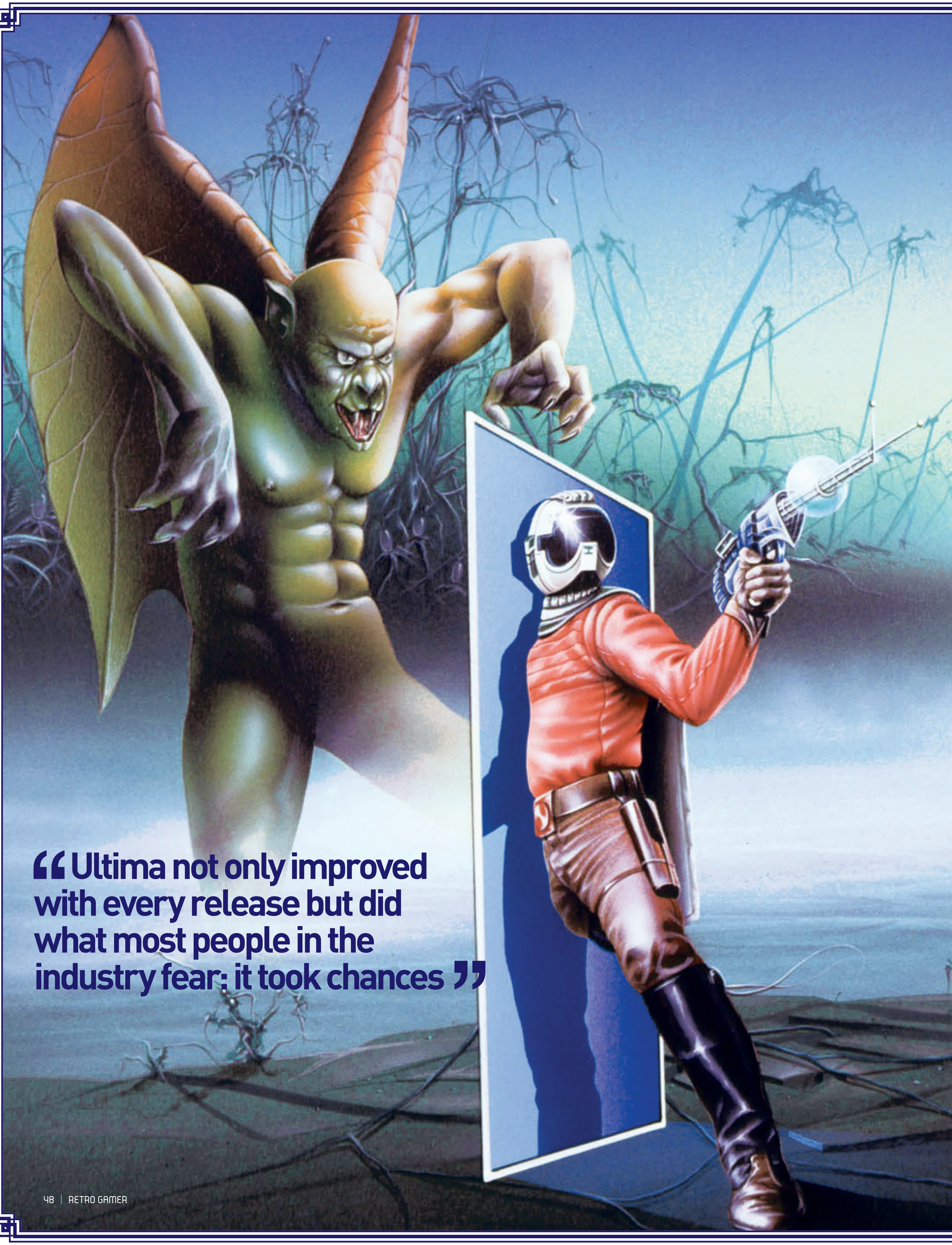
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PAC-LAND (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1984

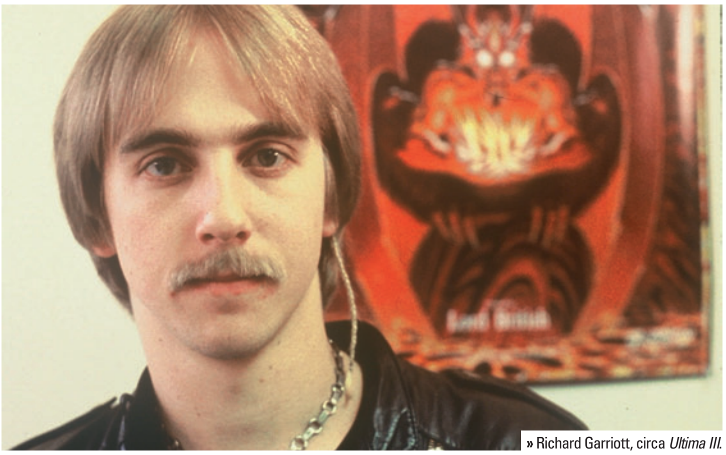
GALAXIAN³
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1990

NEBULAS RAY
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1994





“Ultima not only improved with every release but did what most people in the industry fear: it took chances”



» Richard Garriott, circa *Ultima III*.



The Complete History of Ultima

Arguably the most innovative, most in-depth and, for its time, the most advanced role-playing game series there had ever been, Paul Rigby talks to the Ultima series creator Richard Garriott

The computer role-playing game was – and still is – the most difficult game genre for any games designer to tackle. This is not a genre that demands that you wobble a marble over a few stepped levels, shoot a selection of dragon heads or kick a football. With a true role-playing game, the designer is tasked with creating an entire world and making that world believable. Within that world, the designer must forge a living, breathing culture with its own history and traditions and populate that world with a people you can interact with, react to and become a part of. But more than any of that, the designer shouldn't just create a world that actually works, but make it believable, integrating a gripping story that can involve the player and keep them coming back for more. The trick, however, is to achieve all of that without anyone noticing. That is, to give the player freedom.

Whether you're talking shoot-'em-ups, beat-'em-ups, puzzles, sports games, strategy and war games, flight sims and even adventure games, each one has a common thread: they take the player's hand and lead them down a pre-programmed path. The role-playing game is the only game genre whose priority is to hide or even remove that path and to present a grand illusion of freedom.

Yet how many role-playing games have ever achieved one or more of the above ingredients? Most have been nothing more than treasure-hunting hack-and-slash fests. Arguably, only one game sailed close to role-playing perfection, and that game quickly flowered into a highly regarded series that not only improved with every new release but did what most people in the industry fear: it took chances. Achieving long ago what George Lucas still hopes to produce in the future – the creation of a trilogy of trilogies – that game is known by one word: *Ultima*.

Ultima Minus One

The story began in 1974 when future *Ultima* creator, Richard Garriott, was but a mere whippersnapper of 13. At that time, three major influences arrived in his life. "The first was a copy of the *Lord Of The Rings* book, which was given to me by my sister-in-law," Garriott revealed. "Receiving that book was a pivotal movement. Concurrent to that was when I became exposed to the game *Dungeons & Dragons*, which reinforced that interest and desire in medieval fantasy and gaming associated with the subject. Almost concurrent with that was when I discovered computers."

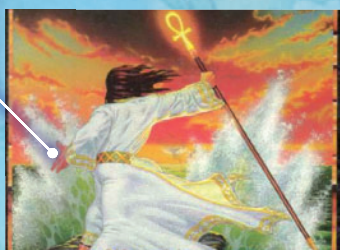
This was 1974, don't forget, so we're not talking PCs and Nintendo Wiis here. In fact, computer technology had yet to integrate keyboards and screens, and the output took the form of a Teletype. Garriott's school was in the fortunate

Ultima Characters

Ultima was packed with memorable characters. Here are just eight to chew on…

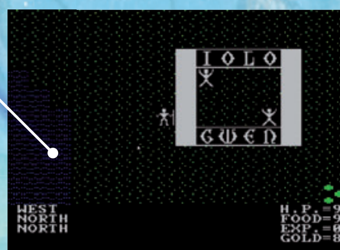
AVATAR

The principal player character: you, basically. There's nothing godly about the Avatar – although there are many prophet-like traits – but there is a sense of purity and high moral standing associated with the character as he/she is linked to the essential Virtues. There is debate as to whether the Stranger of the first three *Ultima* games and the Avatar are the same person.



IOLO

One of the Avatar's oldest companions, Iolo first appeared in *Ultima I* as a jester and famous bard in Sosaria and is an old man by the time of the Avatar's last adventure. By *Ultima II* he had taken a wife, Gwenno. Iolo is famed for keeping a talking horse called Smith that is known for its sarcasm and utter failure at providing any useful advice for the current game.



DUPRE

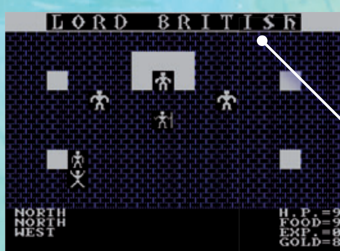
Another of the Avatar's friends and companions, Dupre first appeared in *Ultima II*, in a bar on Mars trying to sell a duck – and why not? Dupre is promoted to Paladin status in *Ultima IV* and becomes a mayor in the town of Trinsic. Between the events of *Ultima VI* and *VII*, Dupre becomes a knight. His final appearance is in *Ultima IX*.



MONDAIN

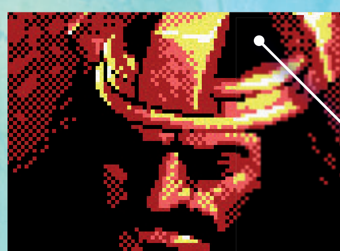
The principal baddie in *Ultima I*, Mondain was an evil wizard and son of a wizard-king in the city of Akalabeth. After getting up to no good, he was initially defeated by a young chap called British – later Lord British – and then by the good Lord's champion, the Stranger. Mondain left behind his lover and apprentice, Minax, the evil figure of *Ultima II*.





LORD BRITISH

Lord Cantabrigian British is both the name of the ruler of Britannia, kingdom of the world of Sosaria, and also the nickname of Richard Garriott, who has often played up to the part and been suitably dressed, including in *Ultima Online*. The 'British' part of the nickname stemmed from his English birth while the 'Lord' part stemmed from Garriott's *DND* gaming days.



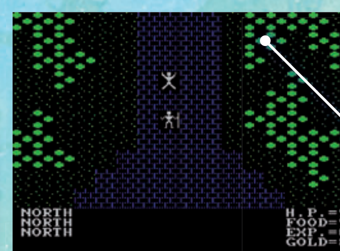
LORD BLACKTHORN

Blackthorn appears in *Ultima V* to rule the land of Britannia when Lord British, exploring the Underworld, disappears. However, Blackthorn comes under the influence of the Shadowlords and turns into a tyrant, much to the displeasure of the populace. After some fine work by you, the Avatar, he is eventually exiled through a moongate to an unknown world.



DR SPECTOR

Based on the real-life figure of Warren Spector, who worked on *Ultima VI*, *VII* and *Ultima Underworld*, Dr Johann Spector was a friend of the Avatar's from Earth. We first see the character in *The Savage Empire* where he appears as a corrupt tribal leader, calling himself Zipactriotl, but the Avatar breaks the spell upon him.



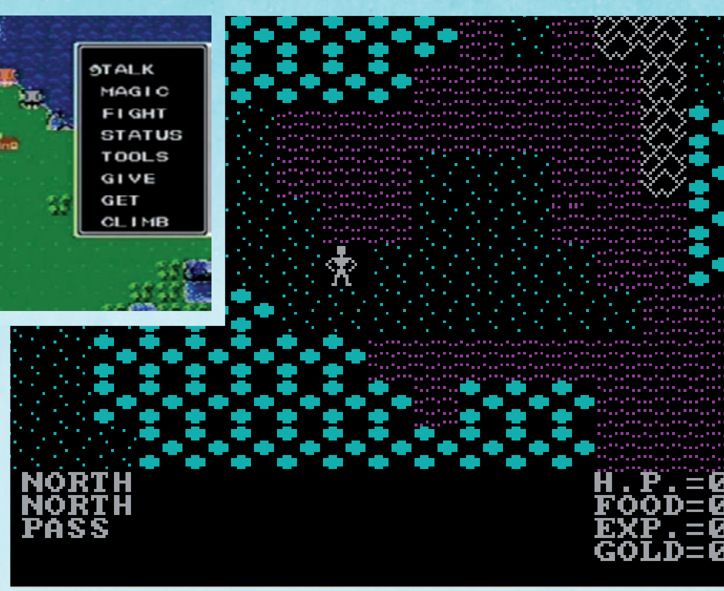
CHUCKLES

Lord British's court jester and general nuisance when faced with the Avatar, who is the recipient of Chuckles' riddles and taunts. The character is based on the real-life person of Chuck Bueche, who also enjoys the nickname of Chuckles. Bueche was with Garriott as a founder member of Origin Systems. He created both *2400 AD* and *Autoduel*.



» [PC] *Ultima IX*'s 3D engine was impressive but was left behind by the proliferation of 3D acceleration hardware at the time.







position of owning two of them, one of which had an acoustic modem to allow the connection to an off-site computer.

"The school that I went to had no computer programming class at this time, but I had a deep fascination with the machine itself," said Garriott. Because I was a good independent study student, the faculty knew that I took on complicated projects and performed very well at them. So, as soon as I discovered this computer, which no one in the school knew how to use in any significant way and there were no classes to teach you how to use it, I asked the school if I could have my own class to learn the computer with no teacher and no curriculum. At the beginning of the semester, I would tell them what I wanted to do on the computer; they would then review it and then approve it. At the end of the semester I would show them my results."

"I asked the school if I could have my own class to learn the computer with no teacher"

Surely this is every child's dream? Have your own class with no teacher, and make up your own lessons. Apart from anything else, it was a guaranteed way for Garriott to get straight As every year throughout his four years at high school. And you know what his projects focused on? Yep, that's right: games. In fact, he wrote his first game on a paper tape spool and Teletype. In effect, the game 'world' he created was pre-pre-*Ultima*. *Ultima -1*, in fact.



"I called these games *DND 1*, *2*, *3*, on up to *28*," he revealed. "They started very small and they became bigger over the four years. But, if you look at the output from these games, they are very obviously the *Ultima* prequels. They used alpha-numeric graphics that would print out on paper, where asterisks were walls, spaces were corridors, dollar signs were treasure, the letter U was an up ladder and D was a down ladder. Using characters for the tile graphics, I was able to create a game that became the foundation of *Akalabeth* that also became the foundation of *Ultima*."

Akalabeth or Ultima 0

When the Apple II was released in 1977, Garriott eagerly grabbed one. Here was a computer with a keyboard, for goodness' sake, and a video display terminal! His immediate response was to take the same products – the *DND* games that he had formerly created – and move them to the Apple II. Before he committed himself, however, he stumbled over a little game called *Escape*, which proved significantly inspirational.

It was a very simple game, produced in low-resolution block graphics. The player was presented with a top-down view of an automatically generated maze, and the game would then drop you in the maze, in 3D. You then had to find your way out. Garriott had an epiphany: "When I saw that I thought: 'Hang on, I can do that in my game. Instead of just having a top-down viewpoint in my game I can also have a 3D viewpoint in the dungeon. Also, instead of having a maze that you wander out of, I can populate it with all my monsters, treasures and so on.'"

Before he launched into the design of the game, Garriott took advice from his mother, an artist, on the geometric solutions of drawing perspective and from his father, an astronaut, on the mathematics of integrating perspective within the BASIC programming language. From there, Garriott created a long table of commands in order to draw walls, monsters and treasure in a 3D view. That spawned the creation of *Akalabeth*.

"It was actually the owner of a computer store where I worked – a place called Computer Land, in Texas, where I had a summer job as a sales clerk – who thought that this game that I was working on in my spare time for my friends was much better than the software currently on sale in his shop," said Garriott. "He said, 'Richard, you really ought to publish that.' At that time, my worldly assets amounted to around $200, so I invested in a bunch of zip-lock bags and Xeroxed cover sheets and began to sell them on the store wall. In just a few days, one of them found its way to one of the first national distributors, California Pacific. They called me up with an offer to distribute the game nationally."

They distributed and sold around 30,000 copies of *Akalabeth*. Garriott's royalties were about $5 per unit, which totalled a rather tidy $150,000 income. And that for a high-school senior for a game that took six weeks of after-school time to develop. The return on the investment was impressive

"It was that success that made me think, 'Gee, if I can have this success with a game that I never intended for the public, then I can do a much better game knowing that it's going to be shown to the public.' That's when I sat down and began to write *Ultima I*."

Ultima I

That investment in 3D graphics, which would be used for underground dungeon-exploring combined with top-down 2D graphics for overground exploration, would be a feature of the *Ultima* games and would be a significant difference between its principal contemporary competitor, the *Wizardry* series. The reason was simple: "The entire game of *Wizardry* takes place in a dungeon. In those simplest days, we didn't have 3D hardware to fill in landscape," explained Garriott. "To produce an indoor 3D dungeon you can have a simple rectilinear-shaped environment. If you then go outdoors you have to have landscapes, a grid for the covering ground and so on, which requires much more powerful 3D. I wanted to do games that included travel across an entire planet. At the time it was not possible to develop a game with a proper 3D outdoor scene."

Meanwhile, the owner of Garriott's initial distributor, California Pacific, sunk the company to fuel his drug habit, despite the fact that they'd had great success with *Akalabeth* and *Ultima I*. Garriott lost money, even with his older brother, Robert, acting as the 'heavy' in a futile attempt to recover it. Distribution was then moved to Online Systems, which later became Sierra Online.

"I moved there because most of my contemporaries, in those early days,

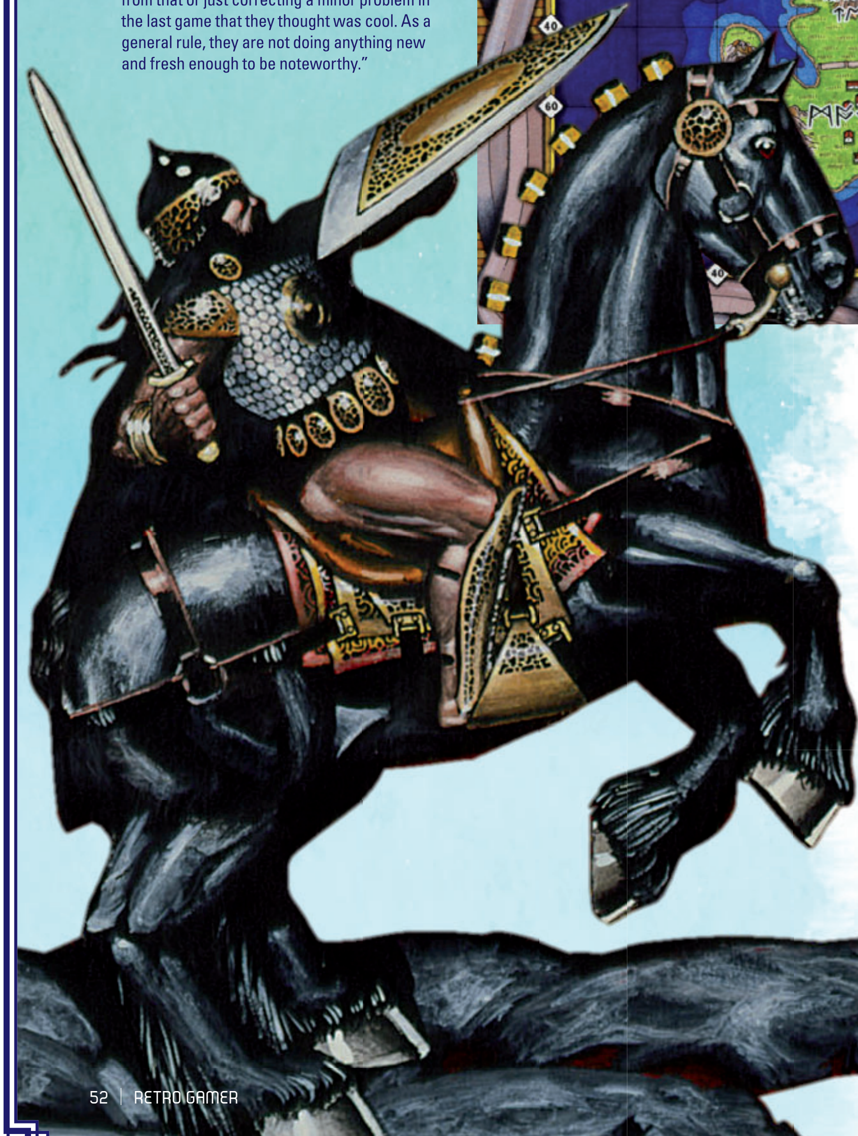


Garriott on Game Design

"Whenever I go to game conferences, I always tell people that the only way to create something that is fresh and unique and consistent and powerful is to truly research the subject thoroughly before jumping to your conclusions about what you should do. I have watched every other game developer that I've ever worked with. When it comes down to saying, 'Okay, it's time to create a magic system, what do you want to do?' they just pop off their first answer and start building it there and then. Sometimes, these guys are just really clever and do a really good job. But, for the majority of the time, they're doing exactly what everyone else has done or are one step away from that or just correcting a minor problem in the last game that they thought was cool. As a general rule, they are not doing anything new and fresh enough to be noteworthy."



» The games' massive maps became a hallmark of the *Ultima* series.



were developing simple little coin-op knock-offs such as *Asteroids* and *Pac-Man*. My games were already much bigger and more detailed than those products, so I wanted my games in a box with big fictional manuals and cloth maps. Most publishers said 'Thanks but no thanks. That's way too expensive.' Sierra was the only company who would agree to what I would call my demands. So I then moved *Ultima II* to Sierra."

Like *Akalabeth*, *Ultima I* was written in BASIC. It was at this point that Garriott decided to move onwards from this relatively primitive language. He decided to learn assembly language for his next title: *Ultima II*.

Ultima II

However, real life got in the way again. Sierra began to suffer from financial problems and it stopped paying Garriott. Brother Robert was asked to pay it a visit but, again, walked away empty-handed. It was at this point that Robert confronted Richard: "Look, Richard. Why don't we start our own company together? I'll run the business, you make the games, and I promise you that when we sell the game, the first person we will pay is you," he said. That was how Garriott's company, Origin, began.

On the programming and game engine side, *Ultima II* was far more powerful than *Ultima I* but, because it was his first time writing anything in assembly language, it was not what Garriott would call "well-written".

Ultima III

"I said to myself, 'Now I know all about assembly language, I can scrap *Ultima II* and build a much better game.' Hence, *Ultima III* became a re-write of the underlying structures as I gained in skill as a technical game developer," said Garriott.

At this point, the ongoing competition with the *Wizardry* series bears a re-visit. In unit terms, *Wizardry* outsold *Ultima II*.

However, *Wizardry II* didn't evolve and appealed to a sub-set of the *Wizardry* fans because the same game engine was used, while *Ultima II* was written in a faster language. "Just for reasons of personal learning, I got into the habit of pulling away the code-base of the previous game and starting entirely from scratch, which maximised the forward, technological innovation. So, each *Ultima* really was better than its predecessor. Therefore, each *Ultima* outsold its predecessor – 50 per cent or better, in fact. Very quickly, the *Ultima* games outsold the competition."

Ultima IV

By the time *Ultima IV* was in development, Garriott felt that he really understood what was required to create a game. Hence, the technical challenge of making a game wasn't the hard part.

"*Ultima IV* was when I sat down and said, 'Well, now I know how to make a game, what do I really want to accomplish with it? What would make a meaningful and good game that offers something more – more than larger monsters and ever bigger treasures, at any rate?' This was the first time that I considered the content of the game. A game that was much more personally meaningful. A game that had virtues in it as opposed to allowing players to play however they wanted. To encourage a degree of behaviour that, if they didn't live by the rules, the behaviour that I espouse in the game, they wouldn't be able to win the game. It was a far more sophisticated game on the inside."

It was risky, however. While writing it, Garriott wasn't sure that people would like it. Doubts arose. Then he heard that, upon completing the earlier *Ultima* games, some players returned to kill and slaughter all the 'goodies' in the game. Okay, fun was being had but, "Here we had people operating like the bad guy and still winning. Hence, I thought it would be far more interesting to create a game where the world reacted logically to your actions. But because I knew that I would be taking away from people the method by which all of these people where having fun, I thought that there was a significant chance that it would backfire; that the players would be unhappy that they could no longer pillage and plunder."

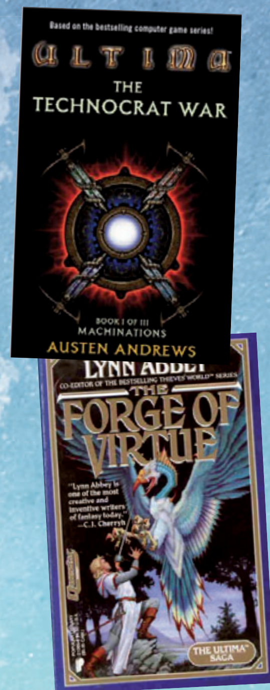
Creating the earlier games had taken just a few months; *Ultima IV* took almost two years to create. "I laboured over that game, in the face of heavy criticism that I always took too long to develop games. *Ultima IV* flew in the face of people who shouted, 'Crank it out, Richard! Crank it out!' I said, 'No, it's got to be right or there's no point in doing it.'"

When it was published, Garriott was relieved to see that it had outsold the previous *Ultima* games by a giant margin. In fact, *Ultima IV* was the first number one bestselling game in the series. It put *Ultima* on the map.

Ultima V

Ultima IV was well-received, which developed the philosophy and morality of 'character'. "With *Ultima V*, I wanted to create a game that was not so black and white. In the real world, it's not obvious who the good guys and bad guys are. In fact, there are people who are really not one way or the other. There are people

"Ultima's initial distributor, California Pacific, was sunk by the owner's drug habit"



Novels & Comics

Ultima even sparked its own series of novels and Japanese comics.

Written by Lynn Abbey, *The Ultima Saga* lasted for two titles and was set in between *Ultima III* and *IV* before coming to an end. The books tended to feature the people of Britannia rather than retelling the computer game stories and included *The Forge Of Virtue* (1991) and *The Temper Of Wisdom* (1992), while a concurrent series was written by Austen Andrews called *Ultima: The Technocrat War* that included *Machinations* (2001), *Masquerade* (2002) and *Maelstrom* (2002). The books are based on the history created for the cancelled online MMORPG *Ultima Worlds Online: Origin*, which diverges from the history of the single-player *Ultima* games just after *Ultima I*.

Three Japanese comics were also created. They were *Ultima: EXODUS No Kyoufu* (*The Terror Of EXODUS*), adapted from *Ultima III*; *Ultima: Quest Of The Avatar*, adapted from *Ultima IV*; and *Ultima: Magincia No Metsubou* (*The Fall Of Magincia*), adapted from *Ultima V*.

Richard The Spaceman

Since leaving the computer games industry, Richard Garriott's thoughts have wandered to higher things – several miles higher, actually, as he emulated his father, becoming an astronaut via the Russian Space Agency. Launching into space via a Russian rocket did have its own practical problems, however.

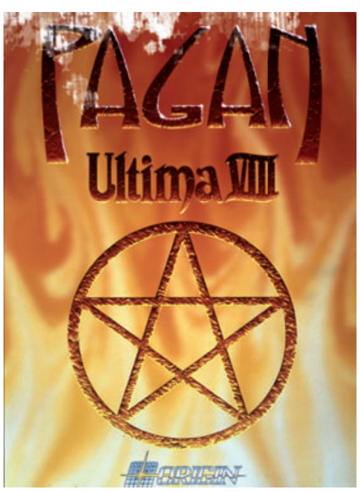
"As you might imagine," said Garriott, "every surface of the space craft is full of instruments, all of which are critical to operation and life support, and so, at the very least, I needed to understand what every button, knob, lever and control did. Also, the Soyuz rocket, Soyuz MA13, is labelled entirely in Russian, all the data manuals are in Russian and all the commands from Command Control are in Russian – so I had to learn Russian. After two days of flight we docked with the International Space Station where I lived for ten more days, then I returned in yet another rocket, the Soyuz TMA-12."



» Yes, Richard Garriott was actually in this particular rocket, racing to space.



» After completing 28 *DND* games at school, graduation would move Garriott on to the creation of *Akalabeth*.





The Ultima Timeline

ULTIMA I: THE FIRST AGE OF DARKNESS (1980)



The first game in the *Ultima* saga. The game surrounds chief baddy, Mondain the wizard, who is using the Gem of Immortality to enslave the lands of Sosaria.

ULTIMA II: THE REVENGE OF THE ENCHANTRESS (1982)



Mondain's lover, Minax, is threatening Earth. You must search through space and time to hunt down the evil enchantress in Castle Shadowguard and destroy her.

ULTIMA III: EXODUS (1983)



Your task here is to destroy the final relics of Mondain and Minax. This was the first game to move to a party of characters. In addition, battles occurred against several enemies on a new battle screen.

ULTIMA IV: QUEST OF THE AVATAR (1985)



You wander the land of Britannia, under the rule of Lord British. The game calls for a spiritual leader and sets a quest to achieve and understand the eight Virtues.

ULTIMA V: WARRIORS OF DESTINY (1988)



Lord Blackthorn has taken the throne of Britannia and three Shadowlords roam the land while the eight Virtues have been interpreted in a much stricter fashion.

ULTIMA VI: THE FALSE PROPHET (1990)



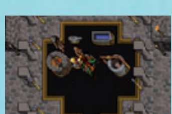
The shrines of Virtue have been captured, and you have to rescue Britannia from the invaders. The game introduced a single scale for the whole map.

ULTIMA VII: THE BLACK GATE (1992)



Along with the other parts of *Ultima VII*, this was arguably the best, the high point technically, design-wise and via content. The game system featured a more free-form map with stackable items.

ULTIMA VII: FORGE OF VIRTUE (EXPANSION PACK) (1993)



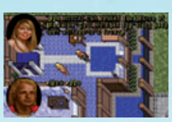
In this add-on, the Avatar has to pass a variety of tests to destroy the last vestiges of Exodus. To do that he has to reconsider the principles of Truth, Love and Courage.

ULTIMA VII PART TWO: SERPENT ISLE (1993)



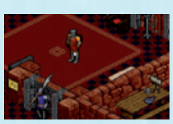
The Warriors of Destiny chase Batlin and stumble across a new land in the first game set outside Britannia since *Ultima III*. It is far more linear in structure.

ULTIMA VII PART TWO: THE SILVER SEED (EXPANSION PACK) (1993)



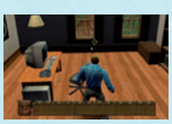
Your group goes beneath the Serpent Isle. This expansion feels rushed and doesn't conclude properly. It was featured in later issues of *Ultima VII*.

ULTIMA VIII: PAGAN (1994)



After the Elemental Titans usurp the evil Destroyer, the Titans decide to impose themselves on the populace, becoming equally cruel rulers. You have to defeat the Titans to free the people.

ULTIMA IX: ASCENSION (1999)



Created among the dying throes of Origin when infighting caused many of the designers to leave and Garriott had to take over the project to rescue it from oblivion. Check out the useful fan patches.



» [PC] *Ultima VII* was divided in two to allow Garriott to start work on *VIII* while his team finished the story of *VII*.

> "Ultima VI's gargoyles are a fully realised race with art and culture, language and value"

who are down and out and involved in illegal behaviour, who are fundamentally good people but just on the wrong path. With *Ultima V*, I decided that I wanted more subtlety to the presentation."

Ultima VI

Garriott is particularly fond of the primary story twist in *Ultima VI*. Being called the False Prophet, the box cover shows the Avatar standing on the chest of a gargoyle. The opening of the game features gargoyles invading Earth and capturing you and some of your friends while killing innocent bystanders. You are set up at the beginning of that game to clearly believe that you are the good guy – you always have been – and that the evil-looking gargoyles perpetrating these evil acts are the bad guys… and let's go save the world. The storyline for *Ultima VI* is quite different from that. You discover that the gargoyles are not evil. The gargoyles are a fully realised race with art and culture, language and value. "With these middle *Ultimas*, I, in my mind, reflected contemporary issues I saw in the world. It's happening today. Look at the religiously based conflicts happening right now – much of which, to my mind, is occurring due to ignorance, fear and mistrust."

Technically, the *Ultima* series improved hugely. Take the graphic quality as a gauge: if you examine *Ultima I*, you'll see that it featured tile graphics – 16 in all. With *Ultima II*, there were 32, while *Ultima III* had 64. By the time you get to 64 you get to the point where you can include furniture and more. When the total rises to 128, Garriott could put letters in those tiles to spell out the names of shops. With 512 tiles, Garriott was able to grow 3D tiles out of the 2D plane. The resolution was now becoming high enough that the game became three-dimensional.

Ultima VII

The time between *Ultima VI* and *Ultima VII* formed a natural break. If you look at *Ultima I*, *II* and *III*, they presented 'Richard Garriott learns how to program'. There really wasn't much of a story in any of them. *Ultima IV*, *V* and *VI*, however, presented 'Richard Garriott learns how to write and present a story'. "There was no pre-planning with *IV*, *V* and *VI*. In those early days, I never knew if there was going to be another *Ultima*."

Ultima VII was where Garriott decided to pre-plan a trilogy; to create characters and an ambience because he knew that there was going to be an *VIII* and maybe even a *IX*. He had to then create a story arc that would continue the process, along with a character. A game that would be forward-looking, not, like *IV*, *V* and *VI*, gazing into the past. That's when Garriott invented The Guardian: a bad





» The cloth map for *Ultima V*.









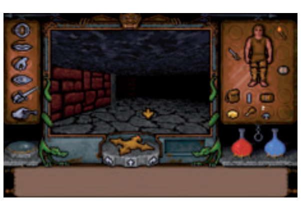
Ultima The Spin-offs

A number of *Ultima* 'associates' were released under the *Ultima* label that ran alongside the main game world as opposed to being part of the principal storyline. *The Worlds Of Ultima* was one successful line that featured both *The Savage Empire* and *Martian Dreams* and utilised the *Ultima VI* engine. *The Savage Empire*, released in 1990, was set in a fictional world that resembled that of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*, while *Martian Dreams*, released a year later, was a tenuous sequel to *The Savage Empire* and was broadly similar in plot to *The Martian Chronicles*, a book written by Ray Bradbury.

Ultima Underworld spawned two individual titles of its own. As first-person titles, developed by Blue Sky, which would later evolve into Looking Glass, the games were labelled as 'non-linear' to preserve the more 'mature' outlook of the *Ultima* series. Set in Britannia, the first title, *The Stygian Abyss* (1992) involved a plot surrounding a kidnapping and subsequent rescue attempt. *Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth Of Worlds* (1993), explored the plotline of *Ultima VII*, slotting in between *Ultima VII* and *Part Two*.

Additional *Ultima* games also include two that were exclusively made for the Game Boy under the title of *Ultima: Runes Of Virtue* (1991) and *Runes Of Virtue II* (1994). As you may expect, neither of these games are part of the main *Ultima* series and are biased towards action and puzzle-solving.

Finally, a much-anticipated expansion pack for *Ultima VIII*, entitled *The Lost Vale*, was planned but was never released.



guy for *Ultima VII*, *VIII* and *IX* and a story to run alongside.

"The system was, again, created from scratch. *Ultima VII* was divided into two. With *Ultima VII Part Two*, you see the company saying, 'Richard, these games are taking you so long. We can't really wait for you to create the next game. There's no product in the meantime. So, while you start the development of the next one, which requires a fairly small team, why don't you let the rest of the team finish *Ultima VII*, in order to keep a product flow to keep the public interested?' Hence, *Ultima VII Part Two* was an outgrowth of a financial strategy."

Ultima VIII

While the company was working on *Ultima VII Part Two*, Garriott began working on *Ultima VIII*. For the very first time, however, all was not well. Until that point, the *Ultima* game system itself was rock solid. One of the proudest achievements of the *Ultima* series, to that point, was the lack of any bugs: "I will cast blame beyond myself for that one. *Ultima VII* was the last game I published independently as Origin; *Ultima VIII* was the first game I published as part of Electronic Arts. EA believed devoutly and showed great graphs that the release date was far more important than content and they pushed everyone to that belief. Hence, *Ultima VIII* was the first and only *Ultima* that ever shipped on time. However, to make it ship on time we had to continually cut back, cut back, cut back. As much as I like to blame the publisher, to be fair, they convinced me. They didn't chain me to the desk and make me do it. They convinced me; I went along with it. It's just that I was horribly misguided."

The game suffered. Hence, if the designers worked on an objective that they wanted to accomplish in the game, they would get halfway through it and then realise that there was no way that they could finish in the allotted time, so features began to be dropped. *Ultima VIII* was the first *Ultima* game where the map that comes in the box has nothing to do with the actual game you play, because much of that has been cut out too. Also, the storyline doesn't make much sense because much of that was cut. Frankly, *Ultima VIII* was buggy and lacked refinement.

"If you look at *Diablo*, which became very popular, *Ultima VIII*'s technology fundamentally was *Diablo* in the sense of how you moved and how you fought. *Ultima VIII* was well before *Diablo*; it's just that *Diablo* followed it correctly."

Ultima IX

Ultima IX, the final game in the trilogy, the final game in the trilogy of trilogies, and the last ever single-platform *Ultima* to be released, was actually developed alongside the *Ultima Online* project. At first, no one in the world was interested in *Ultima Online*, and no one had any real belief in the concept. Garriott, in fact, had a problem getting it started: "Once we started running the beta test and more people joined, the tables were reversed. I was then told that I should stop *Ultima IX* and devote myself solely to *Ultima Online*. I said, 'Screw you!'

"*Ultima IX* only made it to publication because I wouldn't let it die. I wanted to finish my trilogy of trilogies. However, I had virtually no support from the company. It eventually came out, but only via sheer personal willpower. It's a game that I'm fairly happy with because I finished it in my way. However, it had little corporate support so it was still shy of its goal… but was still pretty good."

Ultima, along with its spin-off games and console variants, proved to be one of the most long-lasting and beloved of all computer titles that pushed the envelope of what was possible in an RPG. Exploring language, philosophy and morals, it also proved that games don't have to be targeted towards the lowest common denominator to be popular.

As for Garriott himself? Will he return to the gaming fold? "I don't think my work is done in the games industry. It's just a question of what I will do next."

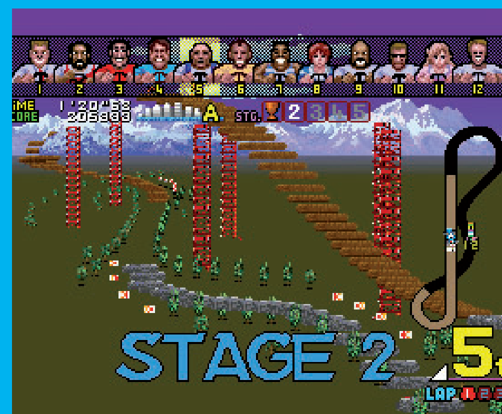
We can't wait…

WHY YOU MUST PLAY...

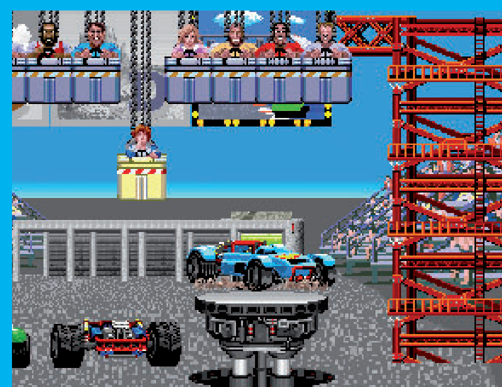
POWER DRIFT



[Arcade] Missed corner. Big rollover.



[Arcade] Study the 3D rotating map before you race.



[Arcade] Th selected driver is lowered into their car.

LET'S GO BACK TO 1988. ONE POUND ENABLES YOU TO PLAY DRAGON NINJA, GHOULS 'N GHOSTS AND HEAVY BARREL. OR YOU COULD BLOW IT ON ONE DELUXE GAME OF POWER DRIFT



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
» **GENRE:** RACING
» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £150-£250

You step up to the machine, click into your seatbelt, and, with a great deal of anticipation, INSERT COIN. At this point, most of *Power Drift*'s contemporaries would simply dump you on a track, and tell you to 'Get ready', but not this game. *Power Drift* wants to seduce you. The opening screen is a riot of activity. Expectant crowds sit in the grandstands. Five vehicles sit idling on the roadway. And high above them are 12 drivers… bursting with personality. Each competitor is highlighted in turn, as the machine awaits your selection.

Just like *OutRun*, *Power Drift* takes place on a series of five tracks, chosen by the user. But since *Power Drift*'s courses are self-contained, you must nominate your preferred route at the start of the game. This is done using the steering wheel, with the START button selecting the currently lit driver. Each one has real character – there's no effect on playability, but it does a lot to enhance the atmosphere. Your racer is lowered into their vehicle. They zoom down a tunnel to reveal a rotating three-dimensional race map. Immediately, it stands apart from the many other circuits you've completed on such stable-mates as *OutRun* and *Hang On*. As the track rotates, you notice some breathtaking ramps, bridges and jumps. You're a long, long way from Coconut Beach.

Your foot finds the accelerator and brake pedals… your right hand reaches for the high/low gear lever. And the camera cruises down to the start line for the big beginning. Three, two, one… The race begins, huge billboards fly past. You pass a few cars, and your cartoon driver gestures at each opponent. Then you hit the first turn. What's this? Your entire viewpoint tilts to illustrate the centrifugal force as you sweep around the corner. Sega refers to it as 'triple-axis point of view graphics'. You would call it 'astounding'. And as the deluxe cabinet rolls up to 20 degrees, you'll be glad you put that seatbelt on. It's like sitting in a canoe full of drunks.

Third-person – or chase-view– arcade racers were very punishing in the Eighties. Fail to take a corner on *Pole Position*? Wham! You hit a billboard and explode. Fail to take a corner in *OutRun*? Wham! You roll spectacularly and your girlfriend explodes. (Metaphorically, of course, it's not *Carmageddon*.) However, *Power Drift*

WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE



ROLLER COASTER TRACKS
OutRun and *Enduro Racer* had believable hills, but they were nothing compared to *Power Drift*'s dips, climbs and hairpin curves.



TILTING HORIZON
Breathtaking tracks are one thing, having your entire world tilt on corners was something else. The cab had a seatbelt for good reason.



UNLOCKABLE VEHICLES
A five-track run of victories awards you a bonus track, featuring either the F14 from *Afterburner* or the motorcycle from *Super Hang-On*.



SMALL BUSINESS ADVERTISING
Billboards include a real American radio station, a furniture store, plus an Australian real-estate agent.

INFLUENCES

The games that influenced and have been influenced by **Power Drift**



■ **POLE POSITION** [ARC] 1982
Namco's 1982 classic wasn't the first sprite racer (hello, Sega's *Turbo*) but it introduced huge colourful vehicles and very solid real-life billboards.

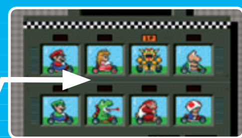


■ **BUGGY CHALLENGE** [ARC] 1984
This 1984 off-road racer was the first third-person driving game to feature a tilting horizon. Taito also introduced gamers to the fun of driving buggies.



■ **SPRINT 2** [ARC] 1976
This 1976 classic is a distant relation, but without it *Power Drift* may not exist. *Sprint 2* introduced selectable tracks and AI opposition cars.

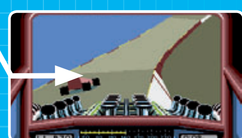




■ **SUPER MARIO KART** [SNES] 1992
This is like a less flashy *Power Drift*. Nintendo retained the in-game map, choice of drivers and spinning when you're hit by another vehicle.



■ **OUTRUNNERS** [ARC] 1993
The third *OutRun* took *Power Drift*'s 'low-frustration crashes' even further. However disastrous the collision, your vehicle slows but doesn't stop.



■ **STUNT CAR RACER** [AMIGA] 1989
Jeff Crammond's racer had a gallery of amusing opponents. The graphics and perspective were simplified, with one AI opponent per race.

> **"As the cab rolls 20 degrees, you'll be glad you put that seatbelt on"**

is much more forgiving. Clipping another vehicle causes you to spin wildly out of control for a couple of seconds. But you will retain some momentum, so irritation is usually minimal. Roll spectacularly on a hairpin corner and you'll reappear on the track with half your previous speed. Even if you fall 100 feet from a raised roadway and crash straight into a billboard for 94.9 WLAK FM love songs… you'll still be flung back onto the track… with at least a third of your original velocity. Mistakes are still costly, but frustration is reduced.

Each challenge consists of a four-lap race, with an enthusiastic sports commentator commenting on your progress. In the upper right-hand corner of the screen, you will notice an in-game radar/map. Finish in the top three racers and you will be awarded the standard gold, silver or bronze trophy… plus access to the next track. Fail, however, and it's 'Continue' time for you. Time to attempt that track again. Earn five gold trophies on one credit and you will be rewarded with one of the first unlockable vehicles in videogame history. An extra stage where you'll swap your buggy for the F14 from *Afterburner*, or the motorcycle from *Super Hang-On*. Upon completing the game, the screen will fill with congratulatory graffiti, including such compliments as "You're great", "Fantastic" and "You're a handsome boy" strangely irrespective of the driver's actual gender.

Power Drift made a big impact in the arcade. And it was snapped up by Activision to be its marquee title for Christmas 1989. The Commodore 64 version was superlative, the other 8-bits were reasonable and the PC-Engine incarnation was fairly good. The DOS port was reminiscent of an upscaled version of the C64 game minus the presentation. And the less we say about the 16-bit versions the better.

If you're looking for your own *Power Drift* arcade cabinet, you might be able to locate a standard cab for around £150-250. The deluxe version is going to be around double that.

Power Drift was one of Sega's final sprite-based racing hits, before *Virtua Racer* started the polygon racing era. In its annual arcade wrap-up, *Sinclair User* named *Power Drift* "The racing game of 1988", and on its 21st birthday, we're still inclined to agree.

THE CONVERSIONS

How the various versions compare



1 COMMODORE 64

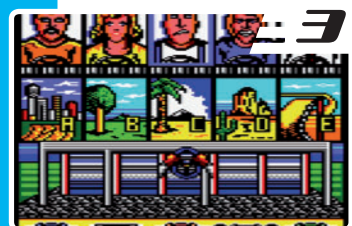
BEST VERSION

Chris Butler took on many tricky Sega arcade conversions, and this is a triumph. All the drivers, all the tracks, all the speed in one load. The road is a simple grey, but you can still 'fall off' the high sections. Oh and we're not including the Dreamcast port as that just wouldn't be fair on the others.



2 PC-ENGINE

This port is very different from all the others, with a new driver selection screen and intro animations. In-game, there's a good sense of movement, with a pretty good rendition of the 3D 'log' roads. Playability is lessened by poor visibility due to tight corners and a very low horizon.



3 AMSTRAD

Predictably, CPC gamers get a similar design to the Spectrum version, with the use of colour the only notable variation. In the case of *Power Drift*, that makes a big difference. The raised tracks are much easier to see in this port, increasing the playability no end.



4 SPECTRUM

128K users get a single load. 48K users don't. Only five driver mugshots appear on screen. The illusion of speed isn't as good as that of *Chase HQ*, and the monochrome tracks don't stand out against the background. Unlike the original, crashing means restarting from a standstill. Disappointing.

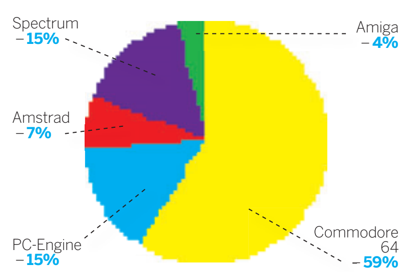


5 AMIGA

WORST VERSION

Sure it has the arcade attract screen, track intros and secret vehicles. They even added a mouse steering option. But please don't press Start. During straights, the floating 'pieces' of road will confuse you. And when you hit the corners, they're so tight you're guaranteed to oversteer.

FORUM OPINION



"Out of the versions I have played [C64 and Speccy], the C64 version is pure brilliance. Not only is the game technically clever, but it's also brilliant fun" **– pottyboy**

"The CPC version is a very good game, but I have seen the Commodore game on YouTube and was very impressed" **– Seadog74**

THE MAKING OF...



SUPER SPRINT

Craig Grannell dusts off his chequered flag and investigates the background behind Atari's iconic Super Sprint. On the front row of the grid, programmer and designer Robert Weatherby and graphics guru Sam Comstock



IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** ATARI GAMES
- **» DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **» PLATFORM:** ARCADE (LATER CONVERTED TO C64, SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, NES, GBA)
- **» RELEASED:** 1986
- **» GENRE:** TOP-DOWN RACING
- **» EXPECT TO PAY:** £500+ FOR A CABINET, £1+ FOR HOME CONVERSIONS

"The overriding goal was simply to create a racing game that would make your palms sweat." Robert Weatherby is on the phone, fondly remembering the genesis of *Super Sprint*, an iconic top-down racer he created for Atari in 1986. At the time, Atari management decided to dust down and update old properties. The following year, Robert worked on *Pole Position* update *RoadBlasters*, but for now he was given an even older, creakier piece of IP to play with. "Even at the time, the *Sprint* series was old… Most of the games were black-and-white and had huge cabinets. One day my boss called me in and said we should think about writing a new, improved version."

Although not an aficionado of the ancient series, Robert was a big fan of cars and racing, and got to work. Immediately he decided he didn't want to depart too much from the top-down viewpoint: "We're talking 1985, and 3D hardware was just being developed, but my boss made it clear we were using 2D System 2 hardware. I thought that would work perfectly because it had enough resolution to make the game look good."

Working through the components of the *Sprint* series, Robert determined what would and wouldn't work on the new title. With the game's controls, he retained *Sprint*'s free-spinning wheel, but ditched its gears: "The wheel not being fixed was *Sprint*'s trademark and great fun – you'd go into a corner, spin the wheel, let go as you went around, and catch it at the perfect time to continue on. But the gears were too complicated. I thought we could pull the game off in an automatic version."

This line of thinking extended to the forgiving arcade-like nature of the collisions. "It's all based on

THE MAKING OF... SUPER SPRINT



» [Arcade] *Sprint* arrived with eight tracks of varying difficulty.

speed, angles and centre-points, there's no elegant mechanism," says Robert. "We knew where the walls and your car's centre point were. When a collision occurs, the algorithm determines whether you've made a glancing blow, whereupon you usually bounce off, or a head-on collision, which usually results in your car exploding."

New hazards were also created, joining the oil slicks from the *Sprint* series. Mini-tornados rampage around some tracks, and animated gates open and close, enabling seasoned drivers to take handy short cuts and less capable ones to get well and truly stuck. "The tracks with animated gates are my favourites," says Robert. "What I especially like about them is as you're racing along you begin to learn the timing of the gates. They're in your peripheral vision and you're trying to time your slide around a corner so you can slide right through an open gate and cut out an entire section of track."

Additionally, although *Super Sprint* was always going to be a two-dimensional game, the team decided to add a little 3D flavour: "Even though the tracks are top-down, we realised that we could add shadows, curvature and banked corners," recalls Robert. "The driving algorithm recognises those corners and so you have better traction around a banked corner than a flat one."

As the game progressed, track design became increasingly elaborate, despite its single-screen nature. Robert decided to add a hidden short cut in one track, graphically represented as a broken fence, enabling knowledgeable gamers to cut a corner. Another circuit goes further, offering a huge jump. "Yeah, I remember that one," laughs Robert. "You need the proper speed to clear the jump, otherwise your car falls down to a lower part of the track and explodes. I guess it doesn't logically make much sense, but all I cared about was gameplay. The fact they're Indi cars and the game's called *Super Sprint* makes no sense since *Sprint* cars, by their very definition, aren't Indi cars. But, hey, it all came together as a fun racing game."

While Robert was overhauling *Super Sprint's* gameplay, Atari artists were hard at work bringing the visual design of the series kicking and screaming out of the Seventies. "We wanted to stick with Indi cars, and the artists did a great job representing that," he says. "From a graphical standpoint, clarity was important. We wanted everything to stand out, with light-coloured cars against a dark track."

Artist Sam Comstock elaborates on the process of creating the graphics for *Super Sprint*: "I studied photos of race cars, practised drawing them in pencil, and then drew them directly into the graphics system at Atari Games." He remembers that memory limitations at the time forced a restricted graphics 'budget', and recalls that only eight rotational positions were allowed in a 16-pixel-square box: "That meant making the most of every pixel, and lots of animation testing to make the rotations look as smooth as possible."

Robert and Sam also explain that the technology was a world away from today's development environments. "Everything was custom – very low-level-engineering stuff – with board sets stacked on my desk," says Robert. "I had a heat problem, solved by stuffing a foam coffee cup between boards to separate them." Elsewhere, Sam had to deal with custom hardware in the early days of commercial computer graphics:

> **"I had a heat problem, solved by stuffing a foam coffee cup between boards"**
>
> ROBERT REFLECTS ON THE DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENT OF THE TIME

"The systems cost $100,000 each and had huge tablets with 12-button digitising 'pucks' rather than a mouse or pen, and most commands were three-letter codes we had to key in." He remembers saving images to eight-inch floppies in custom file formats, later delivered to the programmers by uploading to a VAX/VMS network.

Technological limitations also impacted on graphics. In particular, great care had to be taken with backgrounds to repeat eight-by-eight 'stamps' to save on memory. "We were often asked to use the same images with different palettes to get something that looked different but for little memory," explains Sam, adding that his 'winner' and 'attract' screens use this method, presenting identical car images with switched palettes. "If the artist went 'over budget', there was a haggling process to either cut something or simplify it. It sometimes felt like creating jigsaw puzzles."





» [Arcade] Having lost, the red driver hacks his car to pieces, to sell the bits on eBay.



» [Arcade] On shoving some more money into the cab, your driver gives you a thumbs-up.



» [Arcade] Robert's favourite circuits are those with animated gates, which provide seasoned drivers with short cuts.



Championship Sprint

Soon after *Super Sprint*, a sequel arrived: *Championship Sprint*. Today it looks like a typical cash-in, the only real differences being some new tracks and the number of simultaneous players reduced from three to two. Robert, however, says there was a practical reason behind its creation: "The operators in the field loved the *Super Sprint* game, but the cabinet had a large footprint and took up a lot of space." They requested a two-player cab and also that the game could be kitted out into existing cabinets. "And so the purpose of *Championship Sprint* was straightforward. It had new and improved tracks and a two-player version that could be a small, dedicated unit or that could be sold in kit form to any operator who had a cabinet sitting around doing nothing."

THE MAKING OF...

SUPER SPRINT

Sprint To The Finish

Robert recalls a particularly scary moment during final testing, with *Super Sprint* just days from full production. "Everyone's in the lobby, happily playing the game, and I joked 'wouldn't it be crazy if we found a major bug that caused the game to reset?' As I was saying those exact words, I spun my wheel and the game reset to the attract mode." Robert's heart sank. He had no idea what caused the reset and began trawling the game's code. "It turns out my fellow programmer Kelly Turner had at the last minute cleaned the routines, removing code that had been commented out, but he'd inadvertently deleted a few lines that weren't commented out," recalls Robert. "Luckily I found them, but it was a scary moment; had we shipped with those lines missing, we'd have had a massive problem and been forced to update every game in the field."



» [Arcade] On acquiring enough wrenches, you get the opportunity to improve your car.



» [Arcade] The red car explodes after cunningly being driven head-on into a wall, and a new car arrives via helicopter.



» [Arcade] *Super Sprint*'s spiritual successor, *Badlands* shifted the racing to a post-apocalyptic hell (possibly Birmingham).

“It dawned on me. Why do we need four players? Why not just have three?”

ROBERT’S QUICK THINKING AVOIDS A CATASTROPHE



» Robert was a big fan of the free-spinning steering wheels from the *Sprint* series, and sought to retain them in *Super Sprint*. (Image: Peter Hirschberg, **lunacityarcade.com**.)

Although primarily intended as a multiplayer game, *Super Sprint* has drone cars, which cover slots lacking human players. Interestingly, Robert reveals *Super Sprint* was originally designed as a four-player game, and the drones evolved from an afterthought into an essential component. “With up to three players, we could control the game’s duration by the speed of the slowest drone. For revenue reasons, you had to time the game,” he explains. “With four players there was no such mechanism, and management considered adding a timer, like in the original *Sprint*.”

Dead set against this idea, wanting his game to be more like a racer, Robert had a ‘eureka’ moment during a brainstorming session involving Atari’s president, head of sales, head of marketing and a dozen others: “It dawned on me. Why do we need four players? Why not just have three? So I suggested redesigning the cabinet – which was then square with two players on opposite sides – and making it semi-circular, with three players. That way, there’s always a drone, and no need for a timer.” Robert recalls that the room went quiet, but that the silence was broken by Atari’s president wearing a huge smile and saying ‘that’s it!’ signalling the end of the meeting.

The drones’ capabilities were subsequently fine-tuned to give any player a fighting chance. “On your first race, the drones move slowly, and one’s always about a half-lap down, stalking you, determining from an AI standpoint whether to end your race,” explains Robert. “He then gets faster and faster and decides at some point not to hang back – he’s gonna beat you. But if you lose a race, the drones’ capabilities are knocked back so you can again succeed for a race or two.”

Perhaps surprisingly, one of the most memorable additions to *Super Sprint* wasn’t in the original design document, but arrived during testing: the ability to upgrade your car’s speed, acceleration or traction after a race if you collect enough strategically placed golden wrenches. “By this point, we had the driving model and cars racing on various tracks, and to fine-tune the performance of the car programmatically, I’d created a little on-screen interface to tweak handling,” says Robert. After a few weeks of playing around, trying to find the ultimate driving model, Robert remembers the moment a lightbulb went on in his head: “I realised that changing the attributes of the car was fun in itself, then raced to my boss’s office and said I wanted to enable players to change the parameters of their cars.”

A format was thrashed out: players picked up wrenches, with upgrades enabled once enough are collected. Along with adding depth to the game, Robert says this feature increased *Super Sprint’s* takings: “You improved your car and eventually got to the point where you didn’t want to lose your upgraded car, which would happen as soon as you walked away from the game.”

Along with the decision to allow the race winner to stay on the machine and not pay to continue, Robert noticed *Super Sprint* encouraged interesting behaviour in the arcades: “There was this psychological element: you’re the winner with a hot car and a free game. You’d look around and try to recruit someone else, some poor sucker to put 50 cents into the game, because it allowed you to play for free since you’d won the previous race.”

Even for those who had lost, attempts were made to keep them at the machine, assuming someone who had taken the chequered flag hadn’t already convinced them to stay. Again, Robert says emphasis was placed on car upgrades: “On the screen where you buy back into the game, you see your car’s attributes. To positively reinforce the fact that you’re putting money in, your driver gives you a thumbs-up. This turns a negative (losing) into a positive, acknowledging your payment and saying ‘Thank you. Now, let’s race again’.”

Proud of this, his first videogame published at Atari, and having narrowly avoided a major catastrophe during final testing (see Sprint To The Finish), Robert happily watched as *Super Sprint* became a big seller. Given the opportunity to go back, there’s little he would change: “I would maybe spend a little bit more time on the drone car algorithm, to make the drone paths more realistic – they drive a pretty much predefined path – but as far as the cars, track design and handling is concerned, I was really, really pleased with the game.”

As we draw the interview to a close, there’s just time for one final question. On the sometimes-erroneous Wikipedia, the *Super Sprint* article talks of a hidden track, Super Speedway, accessible only once you hit race 85. “I read that myself just this morning,” admits Robert. “And I have absolutely no idea what they’re talking about.” **Retro Gamer**, bringing you the hard facts and leaving the rubbish, inaccurate ones back on the starting grid.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ROADBLASTERS [PICTURED]
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1987

LAKERS VS CELTICS AND THE NBA PLAYOFFS
SYSTEM: DOS
YEAR: 1989

AREA 51
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1995



THE MAKING OF…

SUPER SPRINT

The Influenced

***Super Sprint* may** not have established the top-down racing genre, but it certainly helped popularise it. Over these two pages you'll find our rundown on some of the best *Super Sprint*-inspired games to ever find a release, and we've even taken the liberty of positioning them on the track in order of their brilliance. In actual fact, you could consider these two pages a very abridged version of those Top 25 features we ran a while ago. Anyway, enough self-reflexive prattle. Let's get on with the race…

01.Super Skidmarks

APPEARED ON: AMIGA, MEGA DRIVE

Position: 1

Developed by New Zealand software house Acid Software, the *Skidmarks* series was a landmark in the Amiga's history. *Skidmarks* was impressive because it took a decidedly tongue-in-cheek approach to racing yet remained one of the most varied and hardcore racers to emerge from the 16-bit gaming era. With a garage crammed full of polygon vehicles, caravan towing, vehicle customisation and an excellent multiplayer mode that allowed players to link up two Amigas and jostle it out in isolation, the game certainly tried hard to wow its fans with an exhausting array of options and life span, not to mention that fun and addictive gameplay, which is why it's still considered one of the best overhead racing games ever made.

08.Thrash Rally

APPEARED ON: ARCADE, NEO GEO

Position: 8

Not looking very much like a Neo Geo title, owing to its so-so visuals, this top-down racer by Alpha Denshie is still an enjoyable top-down racer for SNK's powerhouse. Planting players inside the seat of a skittish rally car, the game allowed you to tear around muddy banks of five rally courses while battling through various weather conditions. With a main game split into two parts – a World Championship mode or Paris-Dakar off-road endurance race – what the game might lack in looks it makes up for in playability and fun. The fact that your car can seemingly drive straight through, or presumably over competitors like they were vehicular phantoms (or paper) doesn't sit well with us. Still, at least it makes the game a bit easier.



06.Rock N' Roll Racing

APPEARED ON: SUPER NINTENDO, MEGA DRIVE, GBA

Position: 6

Developed by Blizzard, *Rock N' Roll Racing* smashed the heads of racing and rock music together in a fusion that forged a sleeper hit for 16-bit consoles. In a nutshell, *Rock N' Roll Racing* played like the bastard love child of *Badlands* and *FIFA International Soccer*, but conceived against the music of Black Sabbath. Like *Badlands*, the racing has a penchant for destruction, with each car fitted with a primary front-mounted turret and secondary 'plop all over the racetrack' weapon to destroy foes and gain an edge in the race. The *FIFA* element comes from the peculiar but workable isometric viewpoint. Finally, the Sabbath component comes from its soundtrack, which features tracks such as *Paranoid*, *Born To Be Wild*, and… er… the *Peter Gunn* theme.



07.Grand Prix Simulator

APPEARED ON: CPC, C64

Position: 7

While the word 'simulator' hanging dubiously at the end of this game's title can be taken with a pinch of salt, when compared to Electric Dreams' shameful 8-bit ports of *Super Sprint*, *GPS* could probably get away the hyperbole. Such was the quality of this early Oliver Twins title, which retailed for less than a quarter of *Super Sprint*'s asking price, Electric Dreams took Codemasters to court over the game's likeness to *Super Sprint* – a claim later thrown out of court. Looking back, it's clear that Atari's game inspired the look and style of *GPS*, and although the graphics feel more rudimentary than *Super Sprint*'s, its slick gameplay, colourful graphics and arcade-style aesthetics helped it overtake lacklustre *Super Sprint* conversions in the race for popularity.

02.Micro Machines

APPEARED ON: NES, MEGA DRIVE, PC, SMS, SNES, GG, CD-I, Game Boy, GBA
Position: 2
Micro Machines boosted the popularity of the top-down racer in the Nineties. Appearing on NES before heading to Mega Drive, it mixed up the formula with an array of wacky vehicles and racetracks. Taking what it learned from the days of *BMX* and *Grand Prix Simulator*, Codemasters updated the genre, which was then looking a bit dated, for a new generation of gamers, and then sealed the deal with one of the best multiplayer modes ever. In fact, the two-player spats proved so popular Codemasters manufactured special carts for the second sequel, *Micro Machines '96*. Called the 'J Cart', this hulk of plastic housed two more controller ports and allowed four competitors to race simultaneously.



03.Super Cars 2

APPEARED ON: AMIGA, ST
Position: 3
Developed by programmer Shaun Southern, the brain behind the excellent *Lotus Esprit* titles, *Super Cars 2* was a polished follow-up to the Amiga and ST smash *Super Cars*. Knowing he'd struck gold with the original, Southern went all-out for the sequel and crammed in split-screen multiplayer, more weapons, and more tracks. The series' unique approach permeated the racing genre with light RPG elements. Between races, players could converse with computer competitors in the game, and even influence the chats – handy when you're buttering up a cop who's booking you for speeding. *Super Cars* took the then tired and simple-looking top-down racing genre and crafted an absorbing game, which is why it sits so high on our list.



04.Badlands

APPEARED ON: ARCADE, SPECTRUM, CPC, C64,
Position: 4
Inspired by films like *Mad Max* and *Death Race 2000*, *Super Sprint*'s spiritual successor saw top-down racing action set in a futuristic wasteland of grey, brown and other shades of miserable. But don't let the dour visuals and glum setting put you off; *Badlands* is a great sequel. With a multiplayer mode that supports up to three competitors, non-scrolling racetracks, and even wrenches to collect and use to upgrade your car between races, *Badlands* will make anyone familiar with the *Sprint* series instantly at home, and yet the introduction of weapons was enough difference to make *Badlands* feel fresh. By adding cannons and missiles to the cars to slow down and even destroy opponents during races, the multiplayer becomes far more frantic and entertaining.



05.Ivan 'Ironman' Stewart's Super Off Road

APPEARED ON: ARCADE, SPECTRUM, CPC, C64, NES
Position: 5
Released in 1989 by Leland Corporation (*Dragon's Lair II*), *Super Off Road* started out as an arcade racing game similar to *Super Sprint*. Like the Atari classic, *Super Off Road*'s multiplayer supported up to three players, although single- and two-player versions of the cab were manufactured. Furthermore, its tracks were single screen and players could customise and upgrade their vehicles using the money earned by winning races. The game's eight tracks had more going on than *Super Sprint*, and were primed with ditches, ramps and jumps, making *Super Off Road* a huge success in arcades and prompting Leland to release a track pack, titled *Super Off Road Track Pak*, to eke more life and cash from the machine in arcades.



THE MAKING OF… SUPER SPRINT



NES YEAR RELEASED: 1989

This is a decent port for the NES, but then it was developed by Tengen, a division of Atari, so you'd expect it to be. The graphics offer a great visual interpretation of the arcade, although the perspective is tweaked slightly so that the camera sits directly over the cars, and the gameplay is smooth and the controls are responsive. Our only gripe is its sporadic difficulty: the game seemingly wills you to finish first in early races before pulling the rug from under you. The other scratch in its otherwise pristine paintwork comes from having no in-game music and forcing you to peg around the track against the droning buzz of a car engine.

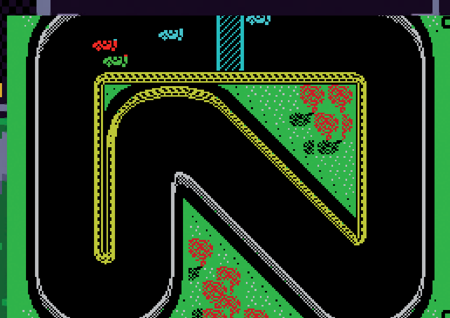


CPC YEAR RELEASED: 1987

We're quickly realising that anything connecting *Super Sprint* and Electric Dreams should be avoided. To be fair, the CPC version looks and feels the most faithful of all the 8-bit ports, including the NES. It features the full eight tracks from the arcade game and even copes with juggling four cars on screen. However, the port suffers from poor collision detection, most notably when driving close to outer track barriers and when taking off ramps. It also has the same sound issues that plague the NES version – seriously, the monotone drilling emitted by the CPC's car engine is likely to make dogs' ears bleed tears. An average port, but still one of the better conversions.

Conversion Capers

***Super Sprint* has** had reverence paid more times than we can count, and yet despite its classic game stature and the influence it had on the race-'em-up genre, it was a pioneering arcade update that was ported down to surprisingly few platforms in its day – hence why we can comfortably fit them all onto this page. So, which version took pole position and which was left coughing and spluttering at the starting grid?



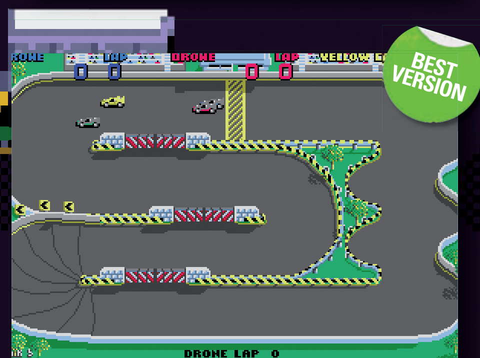
Spectrum YEAR RELEASED: 1987

If we rated games purely on looks then we would hand the 'worst conversion' award to the Spectrum. In terms of gameplay, however, the Speccy version is as good as its 8-bit contemporaries. In fact, it was the smoothest of the three, although the cars sometimes feel a little too responsive, often making it easy to over steer when banking into tight corners. Like the CPC version, you get all eight tracks and a full pack of cars. When you consider the brilliance and quality of similar, more technically complex titles on Spectrum – *Super Off Road* and *Badlands* spring to mind – you can't help feeling that the poor Speccy got a bit of a raw deal here.



C64 YEAR RELEASED: 1987

Ripped to shreds inside the pages of *Zzap!64* for basically being a bug-ridden mess – self-harming cars, glitchy sprites and dodgy physics, all blamed on an apparent lack of testing and a game that felt suspiciously like it was rushed, kicking and screaming, out of the publishing gates – we would have to echo those criticisms. Add to that four tracks, three cars – although this version does feature the car-replacing helicopters – and maddening collision detection, which seems to continually turn your car 180 degrees, regardless of the speed of impact, and this is the worst conversion of *Super Sprint* there is.



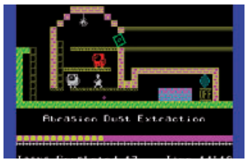
Atari ST YEAR RELEASED: 1987

In terms of arcade faithfulness, the Atari ST conversion sits top of the class. The visuals look vibrant and the cars are nicely detailed, too. As well as sticking a broad tick inside the box marked 'looks', this version feels nippier and a lot smoother than other ports and is the only conversion to boast three-player multiplayer. The development of the ST version wasn't handled by Catalyst Coders but was instead developed by a different team of programmers, hence why it plays a lot better than all the other conversions sitting under the Electric Dreams banner. Bafflingly, *Super Sprint* never received an Amiga port.

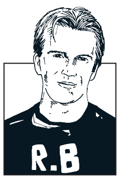

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TECHNICIAN TED

BRINGING NEW MEANING TO THE PHRASE 'HARD WORK'



- **PUBLISHER:** HEWSON CONSULTANTS
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SPECTRUM 48K
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1



HISTORY

Straight from the off you knew that Hewson had created something a bit different from the usual platform gaming fare. The revelation of a loading screen featuring a relentless marching army of Teds, a black border and a countdown clock left Spectrum owners mesmerised and intrigued in equal measure. If this was the loading screen, what the hell was the game going to be like? Two words: brick hard.

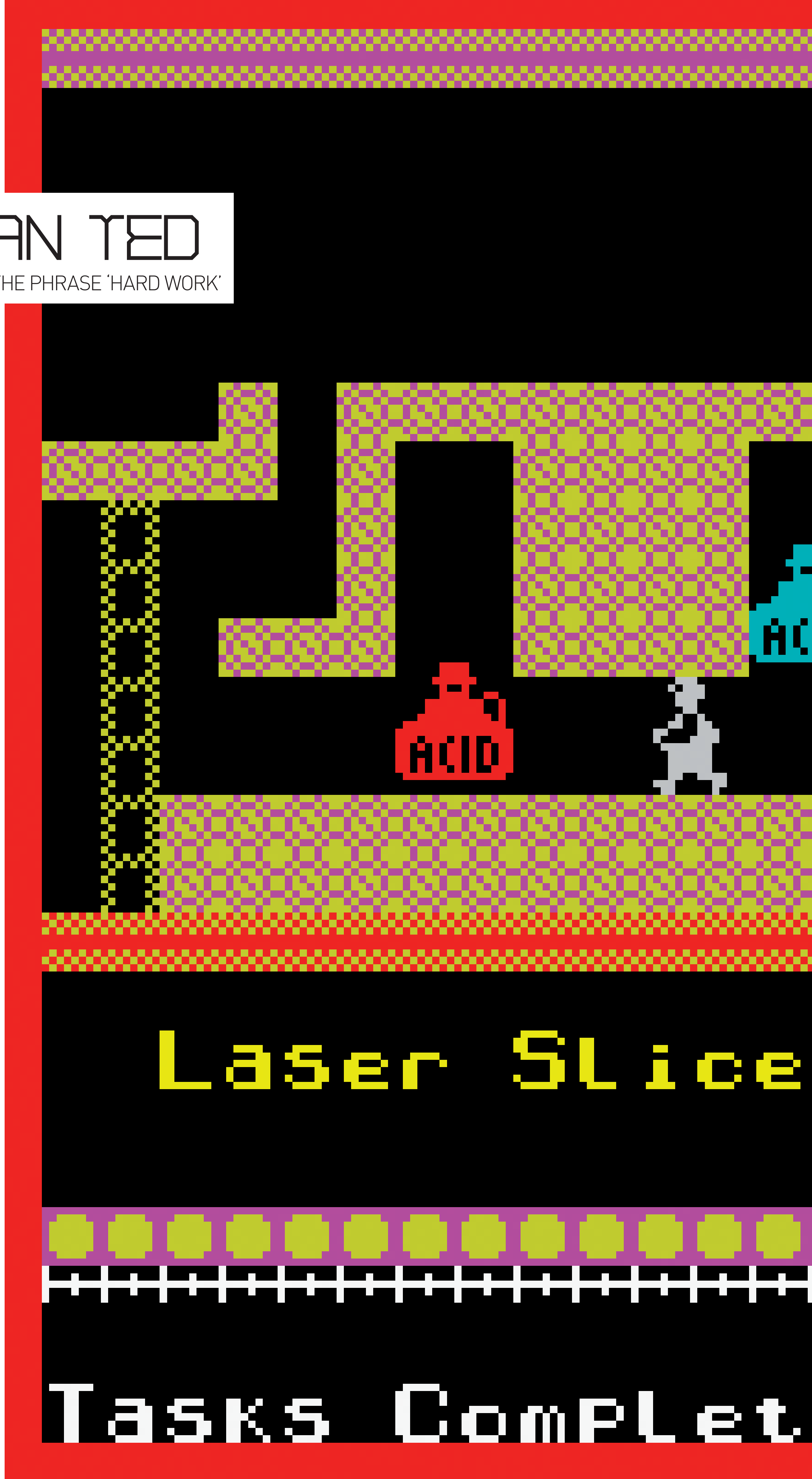
Ted works in a microchip factory. In his working day he has to carry out 21 tasks before clocking off, although the strict order they need to be completed in is unknown. To complete a task Ted needs to locate a flashing task box and turn it off, then repeat the process with the opposing box located elsewhere in the room.

If that wasn't easy enough – which it wasn't – once the first few tasks were completed an additional countdown timer was introduced to your lives bar. This gave you limited time to get to the second task box once the first had been activated, hiking the difficulty level up from being merely unfeasibly hard to practically impossible.

And therein lay the problem – actually the only problem bar originality – with *Technician Ted*. It was just too frustratingly difficult. Now we're not talking easy peasy lemon squeezy can't-get-past-the-brick-wall-in-*Airwolf* difficult. *Technician Ted* had a learning curve that wasn't a curve at all; more a vertical straight line.

Difficulty level withstanding, *Technician Ted* was a slick piece of code and a top-drawer platformer. The smooth animation of Ted and the enemy sprites was superb, while the collision detection was faultlessly pixel perfect. All this was reinforced by some quirkily original sprite designs that were on a par for surreal comic value with anything created by Matthew Smith's mind.

As an exercise in programming it was an accomplished and polished product. As a game you could complete without pokes? Not that likely. Mind you, that setback never did *Jet Set Willy* any harm....

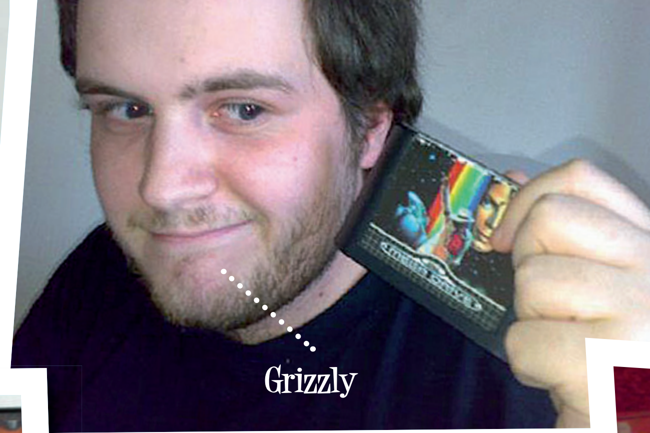



ON
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Separation Plant
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Time 14:00

Few games let you play the role of a superstar, and those that do are usually sports titles, film conversions or 16-bit trouser eggs starring basketball players you've never heard of. This month we play the finest celeb-'em-up to Moonwalk onto our screens



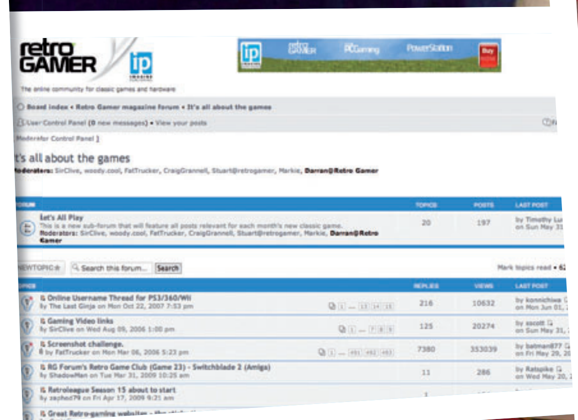
monkey puzzle



Grizzly



Dam





g minty fresh





let's all play: Moonwalker



Information

Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-House
First Released: 1990
Featured System: Mega Drive

Those First Impressions

Stuart While I can appreciate Michael Jackson's music, I was never really a massive fan so I probably wasn't that blown away by the prospect of controlling him in a game. I can't actually remember my first impressions of *Moonwalker*, but I do recall feeling just a little disappointed that the Mega Drive conversion wasn't a straight port of the arcade game. However, after a few minutes I realised the game had a certain charm. It's a neat mix of a run-and-gun game and explorative platformer, very similar to *Shinobi*, and it's a combination that works well. I also seem to remember it being the first videogame that ever let me boss around Michael Jackson and make dogs and spiders dance, but I could be wrong.

thl I didn't expect a superstar like Michael Jackson to have his own videogame and was amazed that you could control him in the game. The gameplay was entertaining and the music was incredibly catchy.

STranger81 The animation was so smooth and fluid. I remember playing it and seeing that the attacks were based on moves from the *Smooth Criminal* video. I was a massive fan of *Moonwalker* when I was young, which made it even sweeter.

MattyC64c Not sure about this one. I like the graphics and the animation, and the way Michael dances instead of fighting enemies, but what is it that knocks the bad guys down? Funnily enough I'd never played this game until recently, although I do remember seeing a Sega advert for it back in the day.

The Master I just showed it to a non-gaming friend who knew nothing of it before, and they were totally gobsmacked at the thought of a computer game featuring Michael Jackson going around collecting children – but then I guess life was so much more innocent back in 1990.

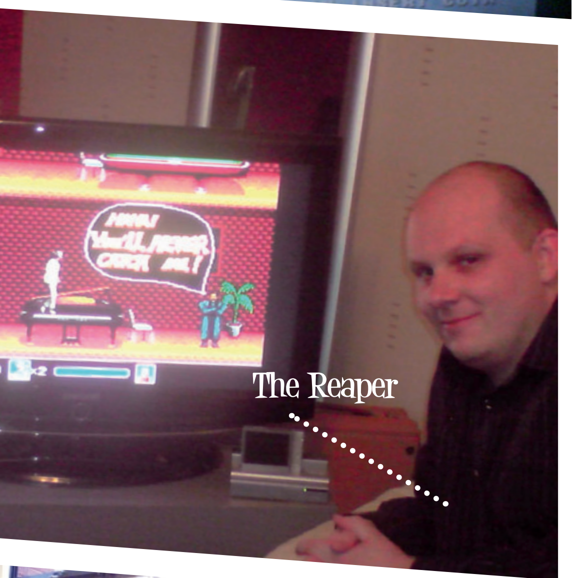
rolan I really love this game. I'm not particularly good at it, but I like making people giggle by whipping out my Nomad and booting up *Moonwalker* – the look of amused shock on people's faces. If I didn't leave my copy at my parents' house I would permanently leave it plugged into my TV as it's the ultimate game to play while hammered.

Spooky My first impression was that Michael Jackson was really cool (in my defence, I was seven) because he could coax enemies into dancing with him. Some thugs wanted nothing more than to hurt poor Michael, and just like that he convinced them to dance along. Now that, in my book, is cool. And don't get me started on the killer hat.

Joey I have only ever played the Mega Drive version once in a local toy shop when it was released. I always thought it was isometric but I must have seen another version of it?

The whole idea of seeking out kids in the boots of cars and in sewers is slightly crazy, but it makes the game what it is. I love all the little in-game touches such as piano keys playing as you walk across them and being able to Moonwalk across the levels.







★ Go deeper: trivia trail

» Michael Jackson also makes an appearance in the Sega Dreamcast game *Space Channel 5*, as Space Michael.

» If you laid every copy of the *Moonwalker* game sold out in a line it could bridge our planet to its moon… quite probably.

» The Moonwalk is the most popular dance move ever, beating The Funky Chicken, The Robot and the 'hold your nose and pretend to sink' one.

» At one stage, Michael Jackson was in talks with Sega to compose the music for *Sonic The Hedgehog 3*. Imagine that.

Best Dance Move



Darran It has to be the iconic Moonwalk – the way you make Jackson perform it is pure genius. You simply hold down attack and then press the D-pad in either the left or right direction. However, I do have one small gripe: because Michael can't attack enemies while performing his signature move, he is quite vulnerable to enemies. Just like the actual move, it seems to be purely there for show and not for saving the planet.

Grizzly It has to be holding down the attack button while pressing left or right to make Jacko Moonwalk. You can make your actions in the game look much more stylish using this move.

random_dave I love doing the crotch-thrust-grab in time to the music. After that it's dancing dogs all the way, but it is pretty cool just to see everyone lean over, over, over, then the bad guys fall over as Jacko gets back up.

Smurph Again, not a true routine, as such, but the animation capturing Jacko's moves is amazing. When he kicks out, it really looks like he's doing it. And the dancing dogs.

Team Alfie Do the Dog. The very best there is. When you absolutely, positively have to kill every muddy funster in the street, accept no substitutes.

STranger81 The best dance routine by a clear mile is the *Smooth Criminal* one in the Enemy Hideout stage. All that hat tipping and the classic leaning that he did in the film is brilliant.

filtermadg It's a pity some versions did not have the *Thriller* music on the graveyard stage, the one I played had *Another Part Of Me* instead.

Standout Moment

Stuart Oddly, the standouts for me are the Catch A Falling Star bits, but they are also the most pointless parts of the whole game. For any of you reading this and wondering what on earth I'm wittering on about, whenever Mr Jackson touches one of the falling stars that appear on screen randomly throughout the game, he transforms into a rocket-firing robot. While on paper that probably sounds impressive, the fact that when you're in this state you can't rescue the kids, the transformation process drains half of his power, and the enemies in the game annoyingly respawn anyway, it's actually about as useful as having a chocolate fireguard patent that gives you the exclusivity rights for some hot, lactose-intolerant planet billions of light years away, and then opening that morning's mail to find that you have contracted some kind of flesh-eating disease and have just seven minutes to live.



monkey puzzle For me the best stand out moment is at the end of one of the street levels where you end up doing the dance off with a whole pack of dogs. Brilliant.

STranger81 For me the standout moment is right at the start of the first stage when Jacko's silhouette appears at the door in the darkened club, he sends a coin flying through the air and it lands straight into the jukebox.

Tepid Snake The standout moment for me was pressing the 'magic' button whenever Michael's health got critical. Rather than attacking, he'd do a crotch-grab instead.

JetSetWilly It has to be the dancing special move for me, too, especially when you do it in the graveyard and the zombies join in. A laugh-out-loud moment indeed.

Best Level

Darran Oh this one's easy. Without a shadow of a doubt, the best stage is Level 3 in the Woods, for the simple reason that you can re-enact the graveyard scene from *Thriller* when you deploy Michael Jackson's dance bomb. Apparently, however, only some versions of the game included the *Thriller* music while others were said to have used *Billie Jean* for this section instead, which is just all sorts of odd, in my opinion. My version featured the proper music so I never knew any different. Anyway, helping those zombies – who seem to be far tougher and more agile than most other enemies in the game – get the spring back into their steps and dance like… er zombies was a joyous sight indeed. I like zombies.



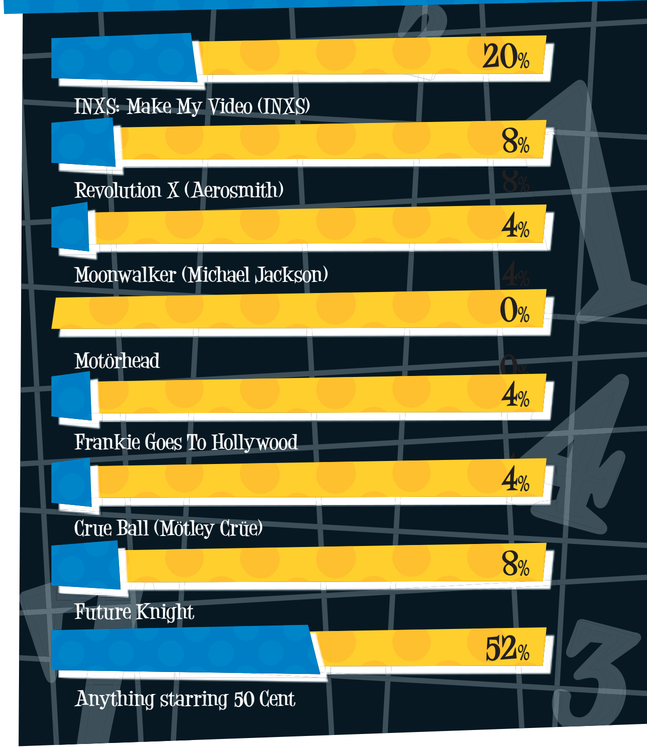
filtermadg The first few stages in Club 30 were the best for me as the Michael Jackson *Smooth Criminal* sprite matched the music video.

Grizzly I think the end level when you transform into the flying car and start shooting down enemies deserves a mention. I remember the level being really intense as you tried to shoot down the boss.

Sputryk I must play it again to be sure, but so far it's the graveyard setting. There's no *Thriller* rendition in the arcade version I am now playing,

Forum Poll

This month: **Worst Musician(s) Licensed Videogame?**



let's all play: Moonwalker

however. Pah! Still, the vomiting ghouls remain. What a gruesome attack that is.

Tepid Snake I'm going for the first couple of stages as well. They match the look of the *Smooth Criminal* music video perfectly, they have the best music track playing in the background, and there's also the amazing 'Jackson flips a coin into the jukebox' introduction.

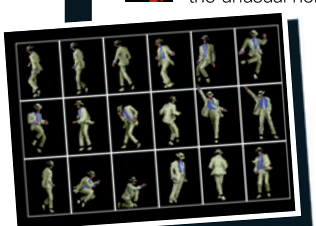
thl The Graveyard level is very impressive thanks to the fogging effect, which creates a rather spooky atmosphere. It makes you feel like you're already lost and trapped in a place with very little hope.

Nreive Yup, I agree, it has to be the Graveyard level with its *Thriller*-inspired horror theme. And the icing on the cake is having *Thriller* play when you use your special attack. Brilliant.

STranger81 It has to be the nightclub at the beginning with its *Smooth Criminal* theme. Classic…Cha Mone! Hee hee… Ow!

Best Conversion

Stuart This is a tricky one as *Moonwalker* has the unusual honour of being one of the few videogames in which the arcade, console and home computer versions play completely different from each other. I probably like the Mega Drive port the best, and while I think the SMS version looks and sounds great, it does



have a few annoying gameplay ticks that bug me: like the way it's almost impossible to keep all your health when you open a door and a henchman pops out. The home computer version is the worst. It feels like it was developed by Jarvis Cocker following the 1996 Brit Awards and offers the same level of fun as you experience when trying to flip cars on the motorway using your mind. I also have a bit of a soft spot for the arcade version as it plays a little bit like *Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters*… especially if you squint your eyes really hard and think of robots.

SirClive I have the Master System version and it holds up very well. It's completely different from the Mega Drive one, but for a side-on platformer it is good fun. It also has a pretty good *Smooth Criminal* rendition.

Antiriad2097 The only version I've really played was on C64. Not good. You'd think C64 could do a half-decent rendition of a platform/fighting game with a nice SID interpretation of the music, but no, they completely gutted the game and started with a new design. While this may have followed the movie more closely than the arcade game and its console brethren, it lacked both the polish and excitement of those games. Throw a long multi-load into the mix and any remaining desire to play is quashed.

Darran Been playing the Spectrum game quite a bit at work and it's fairly bland stuff, made enjoyable mainly because of the ridiculous Michael sprite on the right-hand side of the screen. The Amiga version isn't much cop either. Having said that, though, I think I enjoy the arcade version more than the Mega Drive outing, although that's probably because I'm a sucker for isometric games.

Nreive The Mega Drive version has to be the best conversion available. It has changed its

Classic game? You must be joking

Just because a game's praised, it doesn't mean that everyone is going to like it…

> When I played this in 1994 I felt I was wasting valuable Sonic The Hedgehog 3 time
>
> Roo

> Nope, not for me, it's too simplistic for my tastes. I'd rather play *Cyborg Justice*, *Two Crude Dudes* and *Growl* before *Moonwalker* because they're far more fun and interesting
>
> gmintyfresh

> When I was younger I enjoyed it on Master System but had to turn it off after a few minutes on Mega Drive
>
> Stuart_c

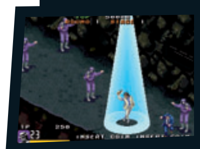


» [Mega Drive] Jackson demonstrates his new dance move: the Dogtrot, sequel to the highly popular Foxtrot.



Further play
Similar titles you may want to try

Moonwalker Arcade
FEATURED SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR RELEASED: 1990



The arcade version is basically the same as that on the Mega Drive, except the action is played out through an isometric perspective and it can be played by up to three players. All the same elements remain but now playing a power-up that transforms Michael into a robot.

Michael Jackson's Moonwalker
FEATURED SYSTEM: MASTER SYSTEM
YEAR RELEASED: 1989



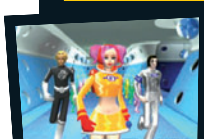
The impressive Master System version is almost identical to its 16-bit counterpart. However, in the SMS version, whenever MJ unleashes his magic he dances alone, Bubbles is nowhere to be seen, and when you save a kid a portion of Michael's health isn't replenished.

Moonwalker
FEATURED SYSTEM: SPECCY
YEAR RELEASED: 1989



While Sega had the console rights to *Moonwalker*, the home computer licence went to US Gold. With the potentially lucrative licence they created a collection of four bland mini-games varying from a *Gauntlet*-style romp to retrieve parts of a rabbit suit to a bizarre *Op Wolf* section that saw Michael brandishing a machine gun.

Space Channel 5
FEATURED SYSTEM: DREAMCAST
YEAR RELEASED: 2000



Michael's next videogame appearance was in Dreamcast title *Space Channel 5*. Gameplay involved replicating dance moves to music, so Jackson was an obvious choice for a cameo. MJ lent his voice and moves to the character Space Michael. He also appeared in the sequel.

Shinobi
FEATURED SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR RELEASED: 1987



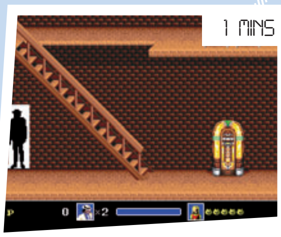
It's probable that when coming up with the gameplay for *Moonwalker* some bright spark at Sega suggested basing it on *Shinobi* and then going off to the fair to eat chips. Okay, so the games aren't that similar, but both involve rescuing kids, feature screen-clearing magic and boasted great music.

Moments in Time

The best bits of Moonwalker and when they appear…

1 Coin Toss

Moonwalker starts off with a neat introduction. A silhouette of Michael Jackson appears in the doorway of Club 30, he walks through the entrance, flips a coin into the air and it lands directly into the coin slot of a jukebox, causing the game to jump into life. It's a great, if a bit ridiculous, scene that suits the comedic and flamboyant feel of the gameplay down to the ground.





2 Bubbles GPS

When Michael has saved all the children on a stage, his lovable chimp, Bubbles, turns up on a shooting star. He then perches himself on Michael's shoulder and directs him towards the section of the level that triggers an annoying enemy ambush. Unequivocal evidence that you should never trust anything a chimp in dungarees says.

3 Dance Off

Given his celebrity status, Michael Jackson should be well equipped to handle large crowds of people, zombies, dogs and spiders trying to rip his limbs off. In these instances it's best to burn off some excess energy with an impromptu dance routine, which causes all enemies on screen to join in until they either die or pass out from muscle exhaustion.





4 Dancing Dogs

Moonwalker ranks among the weirdest games. Gameplay features rescuing children trapped in car boots and buried alive in cemeteries, one move involves the main character grabbing his crotch for no apparent reason, and there's a special move that makes dogs and spiders rumba. It's madder than a bag of stroppy snakes.

5 Mecha Jacko

If you can catch any of the falling stars that appear throughout the game – a task that is actually far more difficult to carry out than it deserves to be – Michael Jackson will turn into a futuristic robot, loaded with lasers and cool heat-seeking rockets. It's just a shame that when he's in this state he can't rescue the kids, thus stopping him from making any actual progress in the game.



gameplay to a standard side-on platforming game in the same mould as *Shinobi*, and its soundtrack is just as good as the arcade, but it's a shame that *Thriller* couldn't appear as the background music for the zombie-infested level three.

Smurph I'm playing both the Master System and Mega Drive versions and think the MS holds up very well. The music is better than you would think, considering the weedy sound that normally assaults your ears. The graphics are decent, and it plays very well.

Dam I first played the arcade game during a holiday at Pontins Camber Sands. I thought it was fantastic and spent an absolute fortune playing it. As soon as I got home I went straight to John Menzies and bought the Spectrum version, naively expecting a similar, albeit monochrome experience. I think you can all imagine how thoroughly disappointed I felt once I'd loaded it up.

JetSetWilly The Mega Drive and arcade versions are both equally good. Both had brilliant music and superb graphics. And the controls weren't bad, either. My only bugbear with the Mega Drive edition is when you think you've rescued all the kids and it turns out you've missed one and have to traipse back across the entire level to find them.

What Makes It A Classic?

Ultimately it's just amazing fun to play. Yes, you could argue that it isn't doing anything new, or adding anything that the genre hasn't seen before, but who cares when the end result is one of the most joyously wacky experiences you can have on Sega's 16-bit machine?

filtermadg The humorous aspect of the game makes this a must play just to hear 'Woo' in between stages as well as the grabbing of the crotch, I'm still surprised they put that in the game. This also reminds me of how awesome Sega was back in the day to acquire this licence. Since the NES did not get a port of the game, a lot of Michael Jackson fans who owned a Nintendo probably were a bit jealous.





» [Mega Drive] Can you imagine a game getting released today about Chris Martin from Coldplay rescuing kidnapped kids locked inside car boots?

Nreive Admittedly, there isn't much variety in the action, but it was a nice contrast to the "physical" beat-'em-ups prevalent at the time. Some good dance/magic moves, the Jackson 'Woo' sound effects, the soundtrack, and those all important special magic attacks.

Team Alfie The excellent use of the source material – be it the film itself, the music or Michael's persona – is what makes *Moonwalker* a cult classic. It's MJ all over, and therefore suitably far from flawless but, ultimately, the right side of genius.

Sputryk I don't agree that it's a classic, it's just another game dressed-up (and very well done) in MJ's world: a bit Off The Wall, a bit of a Thriller, but certainly not BAD. The game doesn't Rock My World, but I will give it One More Chance to provide some entertainment, which it does. And, no, I cannot Beat It.

Smurph For me, it's a classic because of the whole unexpectedness of it. I just assumed that it would be a steaming pile because of the very fact that it was licensed. However, it turned out that it looked, sounded and played brilliantly. And the hilarious animated 'Woo' between levels really helps as well.

Next Month's Game



Beach-Head

Want to join in the fun? Then head on over to **www.retrogamer.net/forum** now.



Although the SNES was no stranger to shoot-'em-ups, it lacked the sheer variety of titles that Sega's Mega Drive offered. On the other hand, it did have Konami's *Axelay*, a truly wonderful shmup that heavily utilised the SNES's Mode 7 graphics mode to create an absolutely stunning shooter that Mega Drive owners could only look at with eyes full of envy. Now an impressive 17 years old, *Axelay* is one of those critically lauded titles that never received a sequel, meaning that unless you have access to the original game, Konami's innovative shmup could well be lost forever. Join us, then, as we look back at one of the SNES's greatest shooters.



Arachnatron
Axelay's very first boss immediately impresses you due to his menacing size and the fact that he's one tough nut to crack. Aided by spider drones and an electric net that slows you down, you need to take out his eye in order to defeat him.



T-36 Towbar
Obviously based on *RoboCop*'s ED-209, this mechanical marvel awaits you at the end of Level 2. Spraying bullets from the minigun situated below his head, the metallic beast tries to obliterate you with a huge laser.



Aquadon
Yes, the name is rather naff, but Aquadon proves to be a rather worthy foe for you. Heavily plated, armed with a devastating laser and with the ability to fire deadly projectiles, this ugly fish boss puts up one hell of a fight.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



Everything but the kitchen sink

Sure, *Axelay* employed some of the best visuals to ever appear on the SNES, but the real beauty of Konami's beast was that it was able to crib from a vast array of different games and other media and still feel refreshingly new. Konami relentlessly plundered everything, from *R-Type* to *RoboCop*, not to mention borrowing heavily from its own shooter library, when creating *Axelay*. The end result is a truly glorious shmup that, rather than coming across like some Frankenstein shooter, instead feels like a fabulous homage to the once-popular genre, making it all the more disappointing that it's never received a sequel.

STANDOUT MOMENT

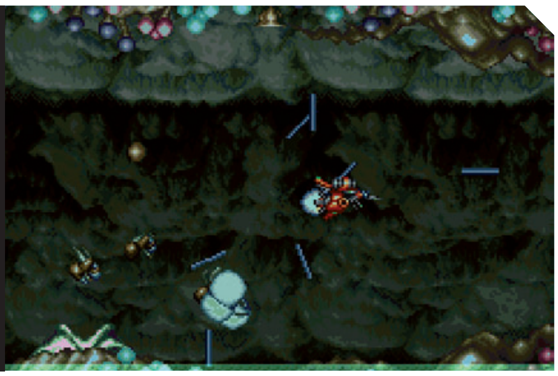


My eyes! My eyes!!!

Even now, *Axelay*'s most impressive moment is when your ship first jets off into the screen and you're confronted with some of the best use of Mode 7 to ever appear on the SNES. It was jaw-droppingly amazing back in 1992 and it still manages to impress today. Rumoured to be one of the last games that some of Treasure's staff worked on, the sheer scope of *Axelay*'s pseudo-3D stages still fills us with impressed awe. Konami was on fire during its 16-bit days, and *Axelay* remains a fitting testament to the company's sheer ingenuity.



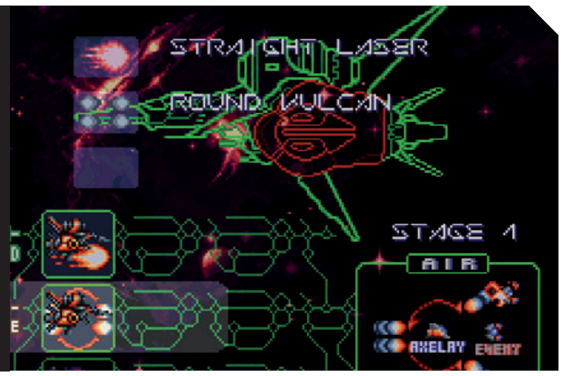
BEST HOMAGE



Bio-mechanical goodness

Axelay steals from many great shooters, not to mention a few films. While the ED-209 clone found at the end of Stage 2 is perhaps the most obvious choice, we've actually plumped for the whole of Level 4. *R-Type* is one of the most influential shooters of all time, so it's hardly surprising to discover that *Axelay*'s fourth stage takes multiple ideas from Irem's hardcore sequel. Bio-mechanical looking aliens? Check! An organic-looking water stage? Check! Freaky, brutally tough boss? Check! It's slightly easier to complete than the similar stage found in Irem's game, but only just.

BEST WEAPON



Surrounded by powerful friends

Interestingly, *Axelay*'s best weapon is given to you right at the beginning of the game. The Round Vulcan is a powerful cannon that can fire shots off in a 360-degree radius, providing you with great cover on *Axelay*'s 3D stages. On 2D levels it performs admirably as well, covering fire above and below your craft. This makes it the perfect weapon for taking out gun emplacements or hard to reach enemy craft. Interestingly, by taking your finger off the fire button you can even adjust the direction it fires in, making it the most essential weapon in the game.

What the press said… ages ago



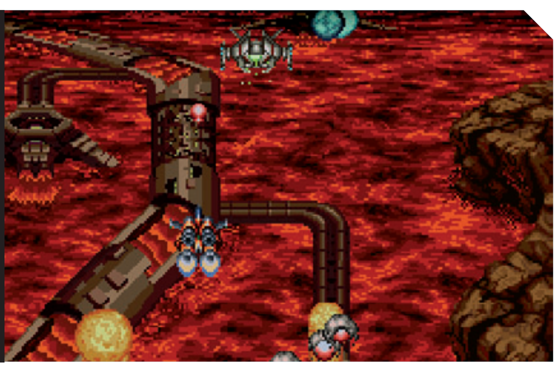
Super Play Issue 2 85%

"Graphically awesome. But even *Axelay*'s greatest fans will have to admit that, gameplay-wise, the whole thing is just a little thin. A really nice game to have, though."

What we think

It's rare that we disagree with *Super Play*, but stating things like six levels is too short and a lack of depth is just laughably wrong. *Axelay* is a challenging shooter that, even after 17 years, still has us wanting more.

BEST STAGE



Some like it hot

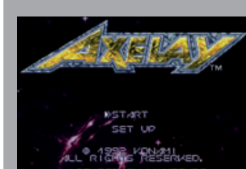
Yes, it's a massive cliche, but Stage 5 is one of the most sensational levels to ever appear in a 16-bit shooter. Barrelling into the screen, your eyes are assaulted by a sea of vivid red, so searing it feels like it could scorch your retinas. Wisps of flame leap from the lava and *Dune*-like giant worms do their best to take down your fighter, while jets of flame gush forth, threatening to destroy your ship with a single hit. Add in huge flaming dragons that appear to have been borrowed from *Gradius* along with a truly scintillating soundtrack and it's hardly surprising that this is the first level that *Axelay* fans always tend to remember.

BEST BOSS



"I am the god of hell fire"

If you were impressed with the pseudo-3D lava effect of Level 5 then just wait until you meet the magnificent mayor that waits for you at the end of that fiery stage. Virtually filling the screen with his huge bulk and intent on swatting you with his gigantic hands, Wayler is an imposing foe seemingly born from both fire and metal. Worry not, though, for despite his sheer size, the huge elemental is surprisingly easy to defeat if you know what you're doing. If you don't, then simply concentrate your fire on his mechanical heart whenever he foolishly exposes it. That'll teach him.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** SNES
- **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
- **PUBLISHER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £15+

THE MAKING OF...

LEGEND

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** MINDSCAPE
- » **DEVELOPER:** ANTHONY TAGLIONE
- » **PLATFORM:** AMIGA 500
- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10+
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BLOODWYCH



In the early-Nineties, Anthony Taglione (Tag to his friends) and Pete James decided to follow up their 16-bit RPG hit Bloodwych with an even better isometric RPG called Legend. Richard Hewison returns to the land of Trazere one more time…



» *Legend*'s sequel proved quite popular when it was released in 1993, scoring in the high 80s from most Amiga magazines.

Unlike the sprawling dungeons found in Tag and Pete's first RPG, *Legend* was played in isometric dungeon rooms with connecting corridors. Each character could rapidly be issued separate instructions, including commands to explore, read signs, push buttons, open or shut chests or doors, fight monsters, cast spells and so on.

The functions that surrounded the isometric dungeon included a 'rallying cry', which summoned the adventurers to the aid of the currently selected character, and a map-drawing dragon called Elliot, named after the dragon in the Walt Disney movie *Pete's Dragon*.

Each character's health was depicted by a stack of skulls, and the current character's inventory could also be accessed. Equipped items for the current character were also shown, along with a 'chicken' that forced the party to flee to the nearest exit.

Various messages appeared at the bottom of the screen to confirm actions, along with some standard command buttons (Push, Take, Look, Open, Shut) and each character's special ability: Berserker Rage, Bardish Melody, Hide In Shadow and Cast Spell respectively.

The game allowed players to customise the name, gender and basic ability scores of each character class – Berserker, Troubadour, Assassin and Runemaster – and items could be traded outside of the isometric world via a multiple-choice style menu. Plenty of items could be claimed as spoils of war, as monsters would often leave objects and bags of gold behind when they died. The party could also travel across the landscape, doing battle with wandering enemies of varying strengths, before entering the next dungeon.

Development began in earnest on the Atari ST. Amiga and PC versions were also expected, and Pete James produced some graphics on the Commodore 64, but that version never progressed beyond a rudimentary demo.



» [GBA] Games of this type were a rarity on the GBA. Too bad it never saw the light of day…

"The Commodore 64 version was abandoned due to a lack of memory," remembers Tag, "and Z80 versions were never on the cards due to low sales of *Bloodwych* on the Spectrum and Amstrad, which left me feeling that their day had passed."

Pete and Tag quickly assumed their natural roles within the team.

"*Legend* was coded by Tag on the ST," explains Pete. "While I initially used Degas Elite to create the graphics, I eventually used EA's ST version of Deluxe Paint." Pete's role wasn't limited to the visuals, though, as Tag reveals.

"Pete had designed the maps for *Bloodwych*," he remembers, "so he was the logical choice once I'd written the map editor." It took three months to create all 23 maps, spread across seven major locations.

"The Moonhenge dungeon was my favourite," remembers Tag fondly. "It grew from a doodle on the map editor while Pete was off making coffee. The first room had seven exits and the whole dungeon just kept wandering around. I always got lost in it!"

Legend also featured a collection of fiendish puzzle rooms, which meant that players would often get some respite from exploring and fighting monsters but would have to use their brains as well as brawn if they were to make real progress in the game.

"The puzzles probably only took a week or so to design," says Tag. "Pete did most of the map-related puzzles and I did most of the so-called logic puzzles."

Many of the puzzle rooms had items or exits that couldn't be reached until a series of traps or logic puzzles were solved first. These rooms were usually solved with some lateral thinking and a generous amount of spell-casting.

By far the most innovative part of the *Legend* game design was the magic system. *Legend* had an open-ended system that allowed players to create their own spells, and their ability to cast spells wasn't tied to a character's experience level like in other RPGs. If the Runemaster owned a mixing bowl, then – funding and availability permitting – he could buy runes and collect or buy the required ingredients to mix whatever spells he desired.

The game offered 16 different runes, which could only be bought from a character called 'The Ancient'. There

"The Moonhenge dungeon grew from a doodle on the map editor while Pete was off making coffee"

TAG ON LEGEND'S LEVEL DESIGN METHODOLOGY

THE MAKING OF... LEGEND



were two types available: Director and Effecter. A Director rune affected the direction that the spell travelled in, while the Effecter dictated the effect of the spell once it hit a target.

Each rune had to be paired with an ingredient, and there were eight different types of ingredient to choose from. Sometimes a vanquished monster would leave ingredients behind, and other times the player had to buy them from an apothecary.

By giving the player complete freedom, an amazing array of different spells could be concocted, as Tag recalls: "There were 10^{24} different spells in *Legend*, but only the first couple of million were of any use. Even after two years of programming and testing the game, I still occasionally discovered a fresh rune combination to add to my spell book."

"We were surprised at how versatile the magic system turned out," agrees Pete. "We had each rune have an effect so you were effectively making sentences out of runes, which is why we ended up with so many combinations."

Players in *Legend* could pre-prepare a list of unique spells and select them from a scroll, assuming the required ingredients were to hand. Simple spells included 'Missile Heal' or 'Missile Damage'. When cast, these spells would fly towards their target and would either heal or damage the target.

A more complex spell was 'Heal Antimage Surround Paralyse Continuous Damage Missile Damage'. That spell would heal the caster, give them temporary immunity from other magic, then cast a number of continuous spell effects on the eight dungeon tiles that immediately surrounded them, including 'Paralyse', followed by 'Damage'. The spell would finally fire a damaging missile from each of the eight surrounding tiles in all eight directions. Powerful magic indeed!

Although it was never explicitly stated, *Legend* was actually a prequel to *Bloodwych*. Part of the game's major subplot involved locating four power crystals and placing one in each of the four keeps. As each crystal was deposited, all travelling enemy armies were wiped out and any towns or keeps occupied by enemy forces were liberated. Once all four crystals were in place, the land of Trazere was released from the tyrannical grip of the evil King.

"*Legend* was not intended to be a prequel," defends Pete. "It's just that when we got to the end, we realised, 'We'd better stick a story on this'. If we had actually thought that it was a prequel from the beginning, then I think we would have approached it very differently."

Legend received very good reviews and sold enough copies to justify a sequel. *Worlds Of Legend: Son Of The Empire* was released in 1993 for the Amiga and PC, and was set in a land to the east of Trazere known as the Empire of the Moon. New players could start from scratch, and experienced players could import their *Legend* party into the new game, retaining most of their items and spells as well as having their existing abilities doubled.

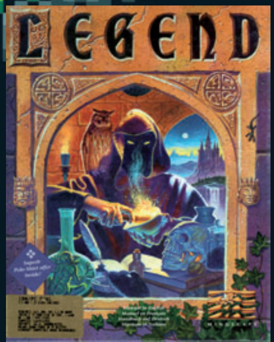
New maps, puzzles and a few new graphics were created for the next chapter in the saga. Although it was smaller in size, the game had a much higher ratio of puzzle rooms second time around.

"We wrote *Son Of Legend*, as we called it, in very little time and chose to expand the gameplay in the outdoor section more than in the dungeons," says Tag. "We did add a number of 'fun' magic items and weapons for the player to play with, but the majority of the design work went into the behaviour of the various factions."

Mindscape published the first *Worlds Of Legend* game and, soon after the release, Tag and Pete approached the publisher with the second follow-up, as Pete recalls.

"We presented them an idea called *Runemaster's Revenge* on the PC, which was still isometric, albeit a much prettier 256-colour version compared to the original *Legend*, which was 16 colours throughout."

"The game was intended to focus just on the Runemaster," says Tag. "The player would encounter characters to



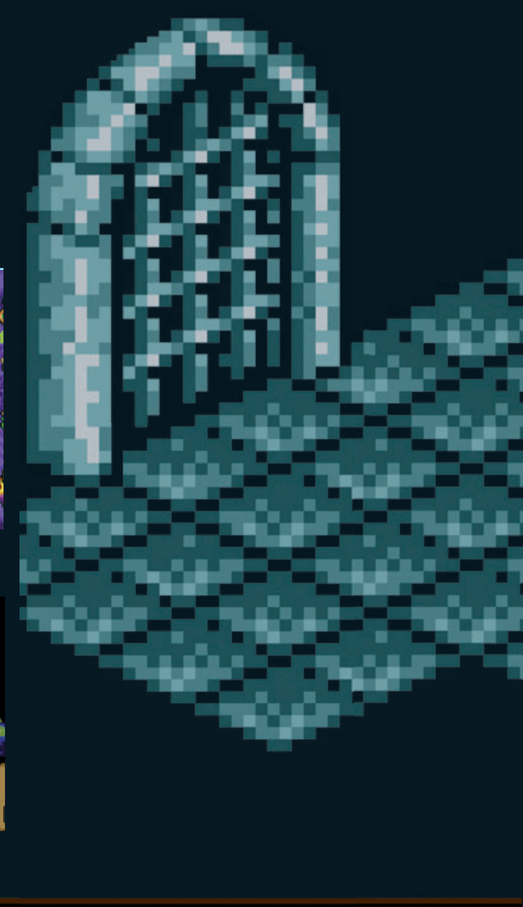
» *Legend*'s mysterious and beautifully artwork certainly drew us to the game when we saw it on shop shelves.





» [GBA] Mixing spells on the Game Boy Advance version. As before, lots of combinations are available.





Publisher problems

Legend started off as a Mirrorsoft title and was earmarked for the PSS label, which specialised in adventure and strategy titles. The publisher commissioned a separate graphical introduction, with the job being awarded to Paul Walker at Arc Developments. Erstwhile games composer David Whittaker was also hired to write the in-game music for all versions (ST, Amiga and IBM PC) after he had recently written the music for the PC conversion of *Bloodwych*.

Mirrorsoft's sudden and unexpected demise in late 1991 saw *Legend* rapidly move to a new publisher. Phil Harrison signed the game for Mindscape International in the UK, which released it in the summer of 1992. Unfortunately, neither Arc Development's introduction nor David Whittaker's music survived the transition to the new publisher. Instead, Mindscape commissioned Richard Joseph to create the music, including all of the Bardish Melodies, and Pete James created a more modest introductory sequence.

In addition to the game, Mindscape also published the *Legend Adventurer's Handbook*, which contained comprehensive maps with a complete walkthrough for the game and general playing tips to help players complete the quest.

The game also underwent a name change when Mindscape published it in the United States, transforming into *The Four Crystals Of Trazere*.



» [Amiga] Who wouldn't want to play a Berserker? Look at the size of that bloody big axe.



» [Amiga] Lack of memory ensured no C64 version, while poor sales of *Bloodwych* killed a Z80 release.

recruit along the way, some of whom would have their own agendas. The rooms would have looked much nicer. We also intended the rooms to be much larger and not restricted just to the screen area."

"Unfortunately, Mindscape was having a difficult time as their US parent, Software Toolworks, fell out with Electronic Arts," remembers Pete sadly. With Mindscape's focus elsewhere, the publisher declined the next *Legend* game, leaving Tag and Pete to contemplate what to do next. It seemed fairly clear that, by 1993, the gaming world was moving in a new direction.

Despite the better gameplay and the innovative spell system, technically impressive RPGs like Origin's *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss* – ironically distributed by Mindscape in the UK – were stealing the thunder away from games like *Legend*. It was therefore time for Tag and Pete to change tack once again, moving into the world of solid 3D game engines and producing PC games for Psygnosis, including *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, *Hexx: Heresy Of The Wizard* (a cunningly disguised 3D version of *Bloodwych*) and *Alpha Storm*, after which Pete and Tag went their separate ways.

Over a decade later, a new adaptation for Nintendo's Game Boy Advance handheld console was begun with Pete, Tag and a new member of the team.

"One of my co-authors of *Shogun* from Creative Assembly, Matt Sartori, and I wanted to get back to being self-employed and form a thriving development team," says Tag. "*Legend* on the GBA looked like something that could be written in just a few months and would be good enough to earn us a grubstake to get us started."

"In order to simplify the interface, we took a leaf out of a certain Miyamoto-san's book and automated mundane tasks," explains Pete. "To open a chest or door, press a button, pull a lever or collect an object you simply moved the cursor over it and pressed a button. We used the shoulder buttons to switch between characters, but that was intended to be replaced by a 'rose' to quick-select characters and their equipment."

"There were 10^{24} spells in Legend, but only a couple of million were of any use"

Changes to the control system were essential on the GBA, and the opportunity was also taken to amend the inventory system and introduce tabs that showed item types together, like armour, weapons, magical items and so on. However, it wasn't only the controls and inventory systems that were changed for the GBA version, as Pete explains.

"Some of the graphics were also updated and the character portraits redesigned. We also adapted the spell system to suit the console, but kept the functionality so there were still millions of spells to play around with!"

Despite creating a game that was 90 per cent working, Tag and Pete couldn't find a publisher willing to take the game on, which they both found an extremely frustrating experience.

"Everyone was impressed with it and said something along the lines of, 'I wish we'd had this a couple of years ago', but we'd missed the GBA boat by then," remembers Tag.

"We didn't realise it at the time, but the DS was also just around the corner, which also might have had something to do with it," adds Pete. For that reason, *Legend Advance* remains unpublished to this day. A sad ending for a truly wonderful game.

Demo dashing

To help publicise the game's imminent launch, Tag and Pete created a playable Amiga *Legend* demo for a UK games magazine, consisting of a small dungeon with a few puzzle rooms and a handful of monsters to defeat. The Runemaster was given some pre-prepared spells to cast, allowing players to get into the thick of the action as quickly as possible. However, a few days after delivering the demo to Mindscape they were asked to produce a new version, as Tag explains:

"I made half a dozen fresh puzzles for the demo level, but the playtesters at Mindscape called to tell me they were still stuck on the second puzzle, so I had to tone the puzzles down a bit!"

A revised and slightly easier demo version was quickly produced and was included on *Amiga Power*'s cover disk for issue 14, published in May 1992. Many years later, the same demo level was reincarnated to help try to sell the ill-fated Game Boy Advance version to a new publisher.

The very first issue of *PC Home* magazine in November 1992 also got a *Legend* demo level exclusive, followed up by a *Son Of The Empire* demo for the PC the following June.







GARY BRACEY

After a shaky start, Ocean Software became the biggest game software company in the country. At the height of its success, Ocean had revered Japanese devs, the best of UK programming talent and even tinsel town knocking at its door. Former development director Gary Bracey reveals all

HIDDEN AWAY, AND over the threshold of a small misleading doorway in Piccadilly, is BAFTA. It's a poignant place to meet Gary Bracey, former development director of Ocean Software. The Mancunian software house was the first to really identify and capitalise on videogame licensing, growing in success rapidly by turning around high-quality film licences and faithful arcade conversions. Gary was there every step of the way, and while his modesty probably won't allow him to admit it, he was the lynchpin at Ocean, overseeing the production of so many games for the company that he struggles to remember every minute detail. Stuart Hunt caught up with Gary to ask him about his time at Ocean and to learn how he helped to bring the glitz of Hollywood to our beloved microcomputers

RETRO GAMER: We always kick things off by asking interviewees about their school days. Did you know what you wanted to do when you were at school?

GARY BRACEY: When I was at school I toyed with the idea of getting into law, but I never really knew what I wanted to do. And I'm now on the wrong side of 50 years old and still I don't know what I want to do. So nothing's changed.

RG: Was there any particular reason why you considered a career in law?

GB: It was just a subject that interested me. I mean most of the school subjects to me were quite boring, fairly dry, and law was something I found interesting because it was varied and stimulating intellectually. I didn't seriously pursue it, but my actual grounding in law – because I took it to a certain standard – stood me in good stead for some of the business dealings I had a little later on.

RG: Were you into computer games as a kid?

GB: No. Unfortunately, computers didn't exist when I was at school [laughs]. I remember I went to college and one element of my courses was computer studies. It was punched cards, a bit of COBOL, that sort of thing. Certainly nothing to do with games. And I think once I had left college, or maybe just as I had left college, the ZX80 came out. That was my first entrée into computer games, but that was literally typing out listings from magazines and making these silly block graphics.

RG: Would it be fair to say that you had a small understanding of programming before joining Ocean Software?

GB: Not really. Later on, when I then got the Spectrum, as well as typing in listings and playing around with silly BASIC routines, I also got a couple of books on machine code for beginners, and it was beyond me. I have a certain aptitude for technical knowledge to a level, and that exceeded it. And it made me appreciate even more the people who could actually do it because I realised then how complicated it was, and it gave me a greater appreciation for those people I would be dealing with later on who were actually experts with it.

RG: When did you first realised that you wanted to work in computer games?

GB: Well, my interest stemmed from computer games, and computer games were still in their infancy when I decided that's what I wanted to do. So I borrowed £1,000 from my uncle and rented a few shelves in a local video library and went to a distributor called Microdealer and bought as many cassette tapes of Spectrum and Commodore 64 games as I could. I used my own Spectrum, hooked up to a little portable TV, to demo the games in the video library, and within a year I had made enough money to open my own shop, called Blue Chip, in probably the most prestigious high street in Liverpool – Allerton Road. But retail wasn't

DOWNLOAD THE PODCAST

For the full lowdown on the Gary Bracey interview, visit **www.imagine-publishing.co.uk/podcasts.php**



GARY BRACEY'S SELECTIVE OCEAN SOFTOGRAPHY

Frankie Goes To Hollywood 1985
Yie Ar Kung-Fu 1985
Match Day 1985
Batman 1986
Cobra 1986
Short Circuit 1986
Highlander 1986
Miami Vice 1986
Knight Rider 1986
Rambo 1986
Street Hawk 1986
Slap Fight 1987
Wizball 1987
Top Gun 1987
The Great Escape 1987
Platoon 1987
Renegade 1987
Arkanoid 1987
Head Over Heels 1987
Target Renegade 1988
Rambo III 1988
Gryzor 1988
Batman: The Caped Crusader 1988
Where Time Stood Still 1988
Batman: The Movie 1989
The Untouchables 1989
Operation Wolf 1989
Robocop 1989
New Zealand Story 1989
Dragon Ninja 1989
Chase HQ 1990
Rainbow Islands 1990
Nightbreed 1990
Total Recall 1991
The Simpsons: Bart Vs The Space Mutants 1991
Hook 1991
Terminator 2 1991
F29-Retaliator 1991
Hudson Hawk 1991
Lethal Weapon 1992
The Addams Family 1992
Wizkid: The Story Of Wizball II 1992
TFX 1996

"When I was at school I never really knew what I wanted to do. And I still I don't know what I want to do. So nothing's changed"

really for me. I felt a little bit jaded and disillusioned with retail, because you literally wait for people to walk in and buy stuff, it wasn't really suitable to my temperament and wasn't terribly stimulating to me.

RG: Talk us through how you ended up getting the job at Ocean.

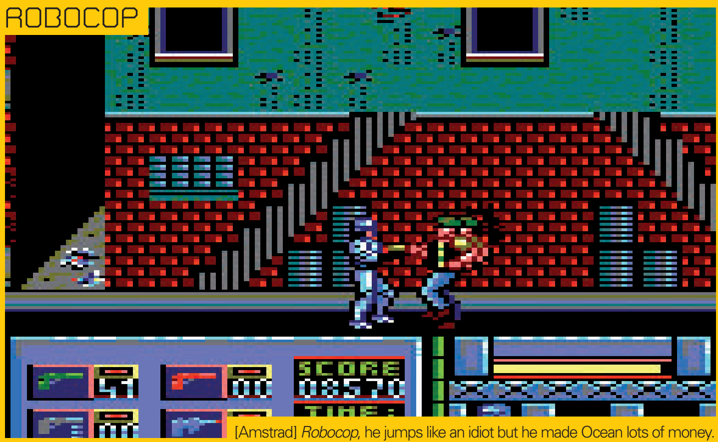
GB: I was friendly with Colin Stokes, from the old Imagine days, and Jon Woods, the then-managing director of Ocean Software. And he [Jon] used to have a wine bar in Liverpool that I used to go to. And one day we were just chatting and I said I was a little bit bored, and he asked me whether I knew much about games? I said I played them and sold them and that I thought I understood what people liked and what made a decent game, and Jon said he was looking for someone to head up the development side of things for his company as he was doing it himself and didn't really know a lot about games, and I said 'yeah, okay'. I've actually still got the offer letter somewhere offering me £13,000 as software manager of Ocean. And that was it, I joined Ocean in 1985.

RG: What state was Ocean in when you joined the company?

GB: When I joined Ocean Software it was already an established company and had been going for a couple of years already. It was in the days of *Street Hawk*, *Knight Rider* and *Miami Vice* – three infamous games. I came in during mid-development of those games and they were in a little bit of trouble, and I think my first task was to try and help sort them out, but they were pretty much lost causes by that time. They were with developers who didn't really care that much for what they were doing and it was just a question of getting something out into the shops.

* FIVE TO PLAY

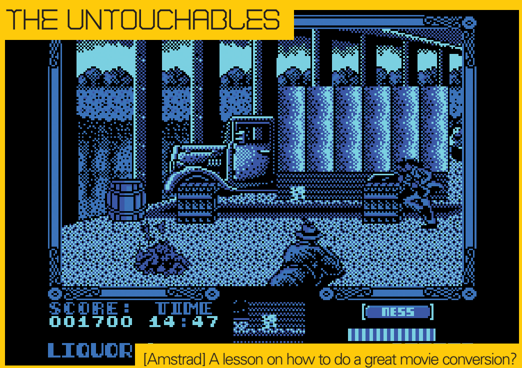
ROBOCOP



[Amstrad] *Robocop*, he jumps like an idiot but he made Ocean lots of money.

PAUL VERHOEVEN'S SCI-FI epic had all the ingredients to make an action-packed computer game classic. Charting the story of a murdered cop whose body gets used for law-enforcement science after it gets shot to bits by a ruthless gang of drug dealers, it was just the kind of far-fetched nihilistic scenario that would appeal to a kid. With sublime graphics, slick gameplay, varied missions and excellent music, *Robocop* remains one of the finest game-to-movie adaptations ever made, and does a wonderful job of re-creating the glum ambience of the film. Purchased for next to nothing from Orion Pictures, it was Ocean's most successful and lucrative licence, prompting film studios to re-evaluate the potential profits that games could yield. If you've never played it, you've missed out on a real treat. In fact, it's as good as the movie (well, maybe not the Amiga port).

THE UNTOUCHABLES



[Amstrad] A lesson on how to do a great movie conversion?

THE UNTOUCHABLES WAS another Ocean classic. Like *Robocop*, it mixed a range of play styles to great effect. Playing the role of all four members of Eliot Ness's posse, you had to bring down Al Capone and his endless stream of trigger-happy henchmen in six stages of side-scrolling run-and-gun and *Cabal*/*Op Wolf*-style shooting action (the latter notable for including one of the earliest examples of a decent cover system, however, this one is a lot more in-keeping with those in modern-day games). Level 4 even included an excellent re-creation of the film's memorable 'baby in the crossfire' scene, paying homage to a classic scene from the movie *Battleship Potemkin*.

THE ADDAMS FAMILY



[SNES] An under-appreciated classic and Ocean's finest hour.

GARY REVEALED THAT *The Addams Family* was one of his all-time favourite Ocean titles. While not the most glamorous property – when compared with the likes of *Top Gun*, *Robocop* and *Terminator 2* – its creators, James Higgins and Warren Lancashire, certainly did Ocean proud, turning out one of the highest-scoring movie conversions of its time by bagging an impressive 94% inside the pages of *Amiga Action*. *The Addams Family* was a wonderful platformer that boasted slick Mario-esque gameplay, gorgeous graphics, great level design, plenty of longevity, minimal loading times and some great humour. *The Addams Family* ticked every box.

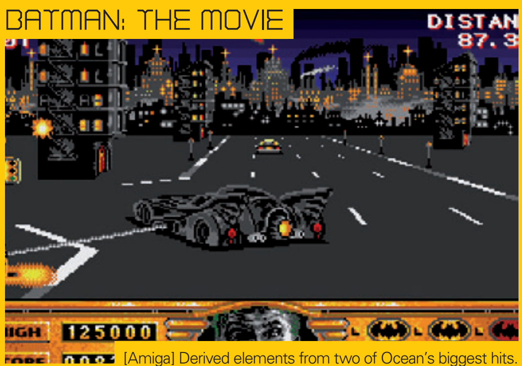
PLATOON



[Spectrum] The only game that lets you throw grenades at Tom Berenger.

PLATOON MARKED THE first of many quality licensed games from Ocean following disappointing *Highlander*, *Miami Vice* and *Street Hawk* era. While this conversion of Oliver Stone's war classic can be accused of trivialising the anti-war message of the film (as Gary points out in our interview, in a game it's difficult to convey the same level of emotion as a movie), in terms of trying to replicate the atmosphere of the movie it delivers. A mixture of six mini-games tied together by the film's wafer-thin plot – hence why it feels more like it was 'inspired by' the movie than 'based on' – *Platoon*'s action ranges from addictive run-and-gun maze sections to frantic *Op Wolf*-style Gun Range parts.

BATMAN: THE MOVIE



[Amiga] Derived elements from two of Ocean's biggest hits.

BATMAN: THE MOVIE was perhaps Ocean's highest-profile release. Such was the hype surrounding Tim Burton's Gothic imagining of DC's Black Knight – well it did mark the first time that a big Hollywood studio had invested millions into a comic book-to-film adaptation since the *Superman* movies – it was inevitable it would become the most anticipated game of its day. Marking the third and most successful Batman title for Ocean, the game, which was split into five wonderfully designed sections, took its cues from *Chase HQ* and *Robocop*. Melding the two play styles brilliantly and doing a great job of capturing the mood and movie aesthetics, the game proved another big success.

RG: Were those games being developed in-house at Ocean?

GB: No, they were freelance. The same developer in Brighton was developing both *Knight Rider* and *Miami Vice*, neither of which was even close to seeing the light of day in any decent form. I can't remember how it was resolved; I was just chucked in at the deep end. I know those games weren't anything to shout about, but they were released and that was the beginning.

RG: Did you have concerns at the time about these games being released into the market, knowing they weren't really up to scratch?

GB: They were well into development at that point, but the developers had obviously been spending far too much time on these things than they had any right to do, so it was a judgement call. We had three choices basically: do we top and tail them right now and get them out, do we actually indulge the developer and fund him for another few months to try and polish it (but the old expression polishing a turd comes to mind), or do we scrap them and start again. But that wasn't practical, nor something you did in those days. You never, ever scrapped a project.

RG: What caused that shift in the quality of Ocean's output in the late-Eighties, with classic titles such as *Robocop, The Untouchables* and Chase HQ?

GB: Well, a lot of things changed. When I joined Ocean there was a handful of developers, and because of the negative experiences of the likes of *Miami Vice* and *Knight Rider* – and I hadn't really analysed it until now – it made me realise that perhaps exercising a little bit more control in-house is the way to go, and by expanding the in-house team we would have a greater observation of the progress. So it was my plan to grow the in-house team and that seemed to work. We got some incredibly talented people, and it really wouldn't have worked without the development talent. We got the most fantastic programmers and the most creative artists and musicians. I'm terrified to mention names because by mentioning some I'll exclude others. We were really so proud of the people we had, and the enthusiasm grew from them. We had a certain level of quality that we were very proud of.

RG: Can you talk us through your role back then?

GB: I had a personal interest in films and so I was sourced with trying to identify some properties that might be useful for computer games. It was great, I was being inundated with movie scripts, stills and studio visits, and we were able to cherry pick because not many people were doing it in those days. We had a narrow window of opportunity in which to develop them, but we got the scripts, and then had to formulate a rough design and I think the quality of the product demonstrated the enthusiasm and abilities of the people who were developing it. If they were keen on the material and they had confidence in the design and the movie itself, then inevitably it would turn out to be a more superior product than those they weren't quite sure of. And you know, we certainly didn't have a 100 per cent hit rate in terms of quality, but the good ones were very good and there are many I'm particularly proud of.

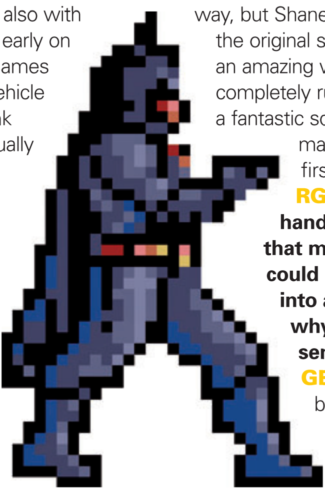
RG: Were most of Ocean's staff avid film buffs, and if so, was there competition to work on the more enviable licences?



» A young Gary seen here holding a monkey while dressed like Eliot Ness. Probably the coolest picture to ever appear in this magazine.

> "You had choices, but in those days you never, ever scrapped a project"

GB: Absolutely, I mean everyone wanted to do *Batman*. I don't think anyone wanted to do *Robocop* at the time – obviously then it was an unknown and reading the script it could have gone either way. It could have been a completely crap B-movie, or a really good cult science-fiction film. Fortunately it was the latter, it became a classic and we did a good job on the game. It became the most successful title in Ocean's history at that point, and one of the most successful titles globally for any company, so that gave us a lot more credibility, and also with the movie studios who early on simply saw computer games as another marketing vehicle for their films. But I think after *Robocop* they actually realised that they could make money out of computer games. So, all of a sudden we got a lot more pro-active touting from the film studios, who were pushing their films for us to make games of because they wanted a bite of the cherry. I was inundated with film scripts, which was great because I love reading them anyway, and there were a lot of interesting properties around.



RG: What was the best script you ever read?

GB: The single best script I ever read – and bearing in mind I read everything from *The Silence Of The Lambs*, to *Terminator* to *Top Gun* – was *Hudson Hawk*. It was outstanding. What eventually appeared on the screen, though, was a completely different film, and from what I understand, the star simply decided to improvise and go his own way, but Shane Black – who wrote the original screenplay – was an amazing writer. But it was completely ruined. It was such a fantastic script, which is what made us get it in the first place.

RG: Were you ever handed any scripts that made you think 'this could never be adapted into a computer game, why are you even sending me this?'

GB: Would you believe *Orion* – whom we'd done business on with *Platoon* and *Robocop*, and therefore had a really good relationship with – sent me the script for *Mississippi Burning*, which was about racism in the Deep South. I couldn't conceive of how you could begin to make a computer game of it let alone the principle that even considering it would trivialise the whole issue that the film's about.

RG: Were there any scripts that you missed, ones that became highly successful movies and could have made potentially very good games?

GB: I don't think there were any we really missed. *Silence Of The Lambs* was sent to us, again by Orion, but we also had to examine the demographic, and we knew our audience and we knew the sort of people who played computer games and they weren't necessary the same audience who would go and see a *Mississippi Burning* or possibly even a *Silence Of The Lambs*. So it was tough. One of the big ones was *Waterworld*, but that was around the time I left. I had a disagreement with someone in the company about it because I wasn't particularly fussed on the script and he was. At the time, Kevin Costner was a huge star and it was a star vehicle, plus it had an enormous budget, so on paper

it seemed to be good, but I was the only one who read the script on these things and didn't really like it that much – but it could have gone either way, I'm no expert.

RG: How did you go about visualising whether or not a script would translate well into videogame form?

GB: If I could find three scenes that I could visualise being re-created as an interactive experience then that ticked the boxes. That's why we made some of our games quite episodic, and the likes of *Platoon* and *The Untouchables* were multiple games in one. It was because it was based on certain scenes in the film, and that was quite innovative in those days.

RG: We understand that you're a big comic book fan and at one time Ocean was rumoured to be developing a game based on the Watchmen comic, is that true?

GB: That's true. We had just done really well with *Batman*, so the superhero thing was playing in the back of my mind. Of course, this wonderful series of comic books came out and I thought it was worth pursuing. So we contacted Dave Gibbons, the artist on the comic book, and we got him over to Manchester, showed him around and explained what we wanted to do, and he was quite keen.

I don't really think he was into computers in any way, therefore it was all quite new to him and he seemed quite dazzled by everything he saw, so I gave him an Amiga and told him to take it away and see if he could re-create any of his characters on DPaint. And that sort of got him into graphic art on computers and he's used it ever since – not the Amiga of course [laughs].

I think the other catalyst to considering the *Watchmen* licence was that Terry Gilliam was looking at making the movie, and that allowed me to sell it internally because I don't think anyone was particularly keen on committing serious money to comic books but if it was going to be a movie then that was in the comfort zone.

RG: So what happened to the *Watchmen* project?

GB: I can't remember whether we actually acquired the licence or not, I don't think we did. I think instead the movie fizzled out and therefore so did the licence, but since then

I've remained friends with Dave Gibbons and we speak every so often, he's a genuinely lovely man.

RG: So, apart from *The Watchmen*, were there any other comic books you would like to have made into a computer game?

GB: Well, there was Lobo. I remember taking James Higgins and Warren Lancashire, who were the two brains behind the fantastic *The Addams Family* game, to New York to see DC Comics, and we were talking to them about doing a game based on the Lobo character. Lobo was quite an outrageous, cannibalistic character, and the visuals in the comics were incredibly violent and graphic. We did actually get the licence for it and I think the game was started, but at the time, Ocean US was established and I think it went over to them. Green Lantern was another one, but that was quite a difficult one to implement. So yes, we toyed with quite a few off the back of *Batman*, but none of them really took off.

RG: Given that many of Ocean Software's games were based on film/arcade licences, did you ever face issues when trying to get games signed off?

GB: With all of these licensed products we had to go through some very serious approval processes, and I remember one example was for *Batman*. When John Ritman did the original *Batman* game, we had to re-submit it and change one element of the gameplay because for *Batman* to do something in the game (I can't remember what) he had to get a batpill to recharge his energy. When [this was submitted to DC Comics and Warner Bros] they came back very strongly and said 'Batman does not take drugs' and we had to get rid of the pills and change it for something else. Then I remember in the next submission Batman's ears were too long and we had to redesign the Batman graphic, which was a real pain.

The Simpsons was the most outrageous, because we finished the game, sent it off to Matt Groening for approval and we got back 'yes it's approved, except Bart's blink is off model'. And we couldn't fathom what they were talking about. We later discovered that the Simpsons' eyelids, unlike human eyes, meet in the middle, and they wanted that replicated.

RG: Did you get to go on set visits while working on these games?

GB: Oh yeah, I spent two weeks of every six in Los Angeles, which sounds very glamorous but it got me very tired very quickly and I missed my daughter growing up. But it was fascinating. We had set visits and I was actually privileged to be in one of the films, which was *Nightbreed* by Clive Barker, and spent two hours in makeup as a monster. I met all the stars and had meetings with the likes of Russell Mulcahy who directed *The Shadow*, and Steven Spielberg on *Jurassic Park*. I met lots of directors and actors and went to plenty of film premieres.

RG: What was it like working for Ocean, we get the impression you were under a lot of pressure to oversee all of these different teams and projects?

GB: I was the face of the company to the studios; but equally I was the face of the management to the development staff, and vice versa. So I was sort of in this limbo, in this unique position. I was either no one's friend or everyone's friend depending on the project, the time of day and how it was going. And it was incredibly stressful because, ultimately, I was the one responsible for the deadlines and the quality. But I was so fortunate to be surrounded with so many genuinely talented people, and not only the in-house guys, but also the likes of Jon Hare, Jon Ritman and DID [Digital Image Design], and quite a number of others who were not only clever, but also nice people to work with.

It was still the early days of games development, remember, so there were no rules, there were no regulations, there wasn't the corporate structure that is in place today, because

> "I've remained friends with Dave Gibbons. He's a genuinely lovely man"



» Gary has always showed a passion for cinema and revealed that he is a keen videographer and frustrated film director.



» Gary is good friends with acclaimed comic book artist Dave Gibbons and has this amazing piece of Rorschach art hanging pride of place in his home.

*NUMBER CRUNCHING

Gary, his dad and his brother were all born on the **28th** of a (different) month

Gary currently owns (and uses) **6** laptop or desktop computers

Gary celebrates his **25th** wedding anniversary this month

Gary has **3** kids and only one of them plays videogames

Gary joined Ocean in **1995**, and was initially paid a salary of **£13,000** per year

Batman: The Movie scored an impressive **90%** in *Amiga Format* magazine

Gary oversaw more than **104** games for Ocean Software

Gary's final games for Ocean were *Sea Legends* and *TFX*, both released in **1996**

Ocean's former address was **21** Castle Street

Gary's first taster of computer games was through his **ZX80**



» During his time at Ocean, Gary got to go on numerous set visits. Here he is on the set of *Nightbreed*.

although the stakes were high they weren't tens of millions of pounds in development, and it was an incredibly creative environment, and people thrived on it and worked late. It was a fantastic atmosphere, and I think the proof is that I still speak to most people involved from Ocean Software, even today, and we're going back 20 years now, and everyone says it was the best time they'd ever spent with the company. Yes, there was enormous stress, there was enormous pressure and frayed tempers, but at the end of the day I don't think there are many people who don't look back on that era with huge affection.

RG: How did Ocean Software go about finding its talent, was it just very fortunate?

GB: I mean yes there was obviously an element of luck, but if someone is experienced and they've done something before then obviously they have evidence of their ability. Sometimes you just had to go by gut and sometimes you'd get it wrong. I remember there was one particular guy, and I won't say what project it was, but he was coming to the end of converting this game to the Spectrum, he was about one week from completion and he turned round to me and said he wouldn't complete the game unless we gave him £1,000. That £1,000 meant that he would never work in the business again, and, to the best of my knowledge, he never did.



RG: Given that you didn't have a background in programming, did you ever come up against resistance from programmers, artists and so on?

GB: I never actually did because there was an understanding and I'd like to think they believed that I could differentiate a good game from a bad one. I did play games an awful lot so I was a punter as well. Also, because I was so close to the project, I knew what was achievable and what wasn't. So if a programmer tried to pull the wool over my eyes and told me something was going to take a month that could feasibly be turned around in a week, then I could be fairly confident in questioning his projection or calling on another programmer for advice.

RG: Were David and Jon [Ocean's founders] supportive of your management style and decisions?

GB: They just carried on with the business side of things. In fact, it was a great compliment I suppose in that they left the development side to me. They didn't get involved in it at all, and only because they didn't play the games and understand the technology behind them. But that was part of what made Ocean a success: because I was close to it and a certain number of the games I was very passionate and enthusiastic about. But to David and Jon they were all commodities and all had to be treated equally to be sold in a certain way, and they did that job incredibly well, I mean they were the best in the business.

RG: So they were pretty hands-off?

GB: Don't get me wrong, they'd scream and shout when something was late, because they had spent significant money in marketing something that was supposed to be coming out next month and I had to tell them it was going to be two, three, maybe

even six months late and ad money had already been spent. There were a lot of unpleasant scenes, but that was all part of the territory.

RG: How hands-on were you with regard to game development? Did you leave your teams to it?

GB: Well, it was my responsibility overall and I was accountable for it so I'd always sit in on design meetings and try to contribute where I could. I came up with a lot of the titles [laughs]. I remember Jon Ritman had an idea for a game, and it was a fantastic concept called *Foot And Mouth*. I mentioned this to David and he said we couldn't have a game with connotations to disease and to come up with another title. And because of the nature of the game, I came up with an alternative title (I'm pretty sure it was me, but maybe it was Jon) – *Head Over Heels*. But no, we would have regular development meetings. I'd be constantly walking around watching the progress, playing around, testing, visiting external freelance companies to see how they were going. And of course in those very early days there were no producers, so I was doing it all myself.

RG: Where did you find the time to keep on top of all those projects and games?

GB: You just did when you're young and you're really enthusiastic. It was my life, it didn't matter, and you didn't give a second thought to it. Of course, there came a point when it was physically impossible and we took on Lorraine Broxton and Colin Gordon who became producers and oversaw the development of specific games, but in the early days it was just myself.

RG: Looking back, was there a point when you thought it was getting too much for you?

GB: I think the problem starts once you start to lose that passion. That's when you've got to start re-evaluating whether this is something you want to continue doing, or whether you're going to be effective in what you're doing. But think about it, I was a kid with a train set. I was into videogames, I was into films and comic books and here I was indulging all of those interests in one job. It was any kid's dream. And I was young enough to sustain, I had the energy because of my age and it was brilliant.

RG: Can you tell us a little about the period when Ocean purchased the Imagine brand and how that affected the company?

GB: Imagine was actually the reason that Ocean came about, because Jon and David saw a documentary called *Commercial Breaks* on TV about this young crowd of lads who were seemingly making a lot of money churning out computer games, and Jon and David said, 'well, we can do that and we have business acumen' and that's what they decided to do, and the irony is that later on they decided to buy the label.

RG: How did the acquisition of the Imagine label change Ocean Software?

GB: Well, we did start to deal with a lot more people, such as the likes of Denton Design, which was spawned from the old Imagine. But I think David established that relationship before I arrived anyway with *Frankie Goes To Hollywood*. I first got involved with them on *The Great Escape*.



“Everyone tries to emulate rather than innovate. Peter Molyneux is an exception”

RG: Of all the games that Ocean made, which was your favourite?

GB: They varied from era to era. It's very difficult to pick one. Looking back I probably played *Head Over Heels* and *The Addams Family* more than any other, but I also really got into *F-29*, which was my first real taste of flight simulators. Pathetically, I spent endless hours on *Arkanoid* and also *Slap Fight*. It just depended what I was into at the time. The only ones I never really got to grips with were racing games, *Chase HQ* and that sort of thing never really appealed to me.

RG: How did Ocean's relationship with Bob Wakelin come about?

GB: That predated me and I think that had something to do with Steve Blower, who was the art director. He must have had the relationship with Bob. I mean, I knew Bob because I was into comic books and he had done a fair bit of comic book work and then we became friends. I obviously got involved with the briefs for Bob, and I used to describe the game to him so he could come up with ideas for the artwork, but in terms of originally sourcing him, I had nothing to do with that.

RG: Of all the film-licensed games that Ocean made, which one do you think best re-creates the spirit of the source material?

GB: In terms of films it's very difficult. You can't deliver the emotion of a film. I think in terms of quality – which is the only way I can judge it because an interactive experience is very different from a passive one – the games I was most proud of, and this is in no particular order, I would say started with *Top Gun*, *The Untouchables*, *Platoon*, *Batman: The Movie*, *The Addams Family* and *Robocop*. I was particularly pleased with how these games turned out.

RG: So, could you tell us a little bit more about what you're getting up to nowadays and specifically with your company Digimask?

GB: Well, I wanted to do my own thing and came up this idea: wouldn't it be great if you could put yourself in the game? So we've developed this technology whereby you take two photos of your head, one at the front and one at the side, and our technology automatically converts it into a 3D model, complete with muscles. And the idea is that you can then import that head into the game and replace one of the regular heads with your own. But although it was developed as quite a neat little gizmo for videogames it's been used extensively for marketing and to promote movies and things like that.

RG: Looking back, how do you think of the industry has changed over the last 20 years?

GB: It's a very, very different business now, and I think the reason for this is down to budgets. We were talking before about the stresses, the strains and pressures of developing all of these games, but bear in mind that back then the cost of development was in the tens of thousands of pounds, which is still a significant amount, but it's not going to send a company to the wall. In these days of 10 million-plus budgets, there is an enormous amount of strain and pressure, and because of that I think most publishers try to play it safe. So when someone brings out a great game like *Grand Theft Auto*, everyone else tries to emulate it. It's always been endemic in this industry that someone has a success with a particular genre and everyone tries to emulate it rather than innovate, and I would hold Peter Molyneux up to be one of those exceptions who is still very much into innovation and isn't governed by the tastes of today or yesterday, and he has to be admired for that. However, with the advent recently of mobile devices such as iPhone and Nintendo DS, the cost has reverted back a little bit to something more sustainable so people can be more adventurous with their development ideas and the stakes aren't so high if they fail.

RG: Do you own any next-generation machines, and if so, what games have you recently played and enjoyed?

GB: I have all of the latest machines at home. In fact, I bought a DSi two weeks ago just to play around with the camera and to also have a go with *Professor Layton And The Curious Village*, which is really good. But as far as games that I've played and enjoyed recently, I guess *Oblivion*, *BioShock* and *Fable II* really stand out for me as being exceptional. I think *BioShock* was a great example of how well you can get narrative to work within an interactive game, it just flowed beautifully and unobtrusively and that's really rare.

RG: Before you go, can you tell us something you've never told anyone before?

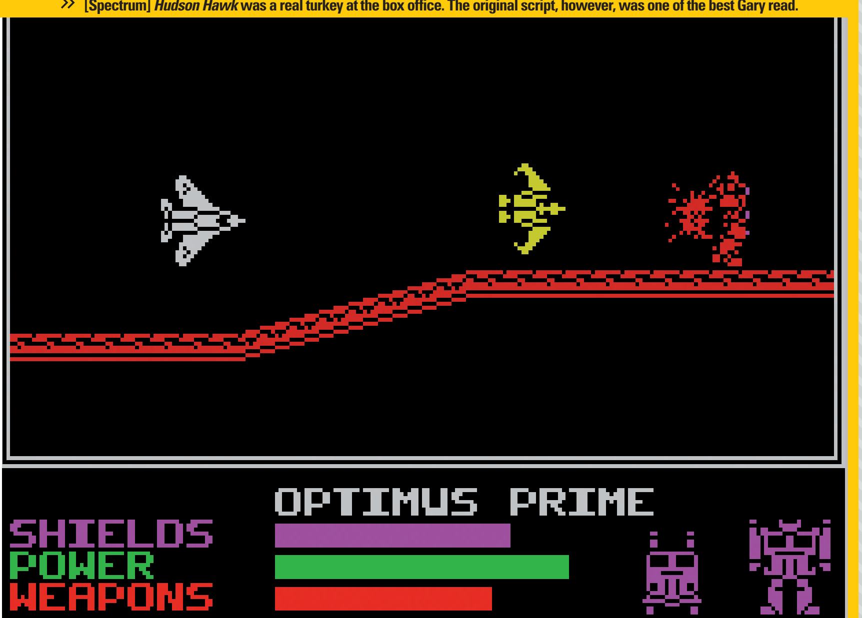
GB: Well, when I was dropped in to recover the whole *Street Hawk*/*Knight Rider* situation, that was really the catalyst that made me bring in more in-house teams. I've never said that before because I've never really analysed it before. I'd also say – something I've never said before – that I wish that I had spent more time savouring that period. Looking back so fondly now, along with lots of my other colleagues who I worked with in those days, I think if we had appreciated it more at the time it would have been even better, but we were just so caught up in getting the job done that we never had a chance to smell the roses.



» [Amstrad] Gary reveals that he came up with the title *Head Over Heels* for Jon Ritman's isometric classic, or so he recalls.



» [Spectrum] *Hudson Hawk* was a real turkey at the box office. The original script, however, was one of the best Gary read.



YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

We were inundated with questions for Gary and he kindly visited our forum to answer those we didn't have time to ask. Check online if yours isn't here

Now you work at Digimask, what game would you like to have starred in if the technology was around in the Ocean days?
I think it would have been great to have been in *Renegade*, particularly if you could interact with your friends so that the whole gang was you and your mates – that type of thing. I think *Renegade* would have lent itself brilliantly to that.

What did Ocean really think about the GX4000?
We were quite pragmatic, but it was pretty much the same hardware from what I can remember. To us it was just a commercial thing, but I would imagine we would have seen it as a Nintendo wannabe and UK's response to the invasion of Japan coming here with the Sega Master System and the Nintendo 8-bit.

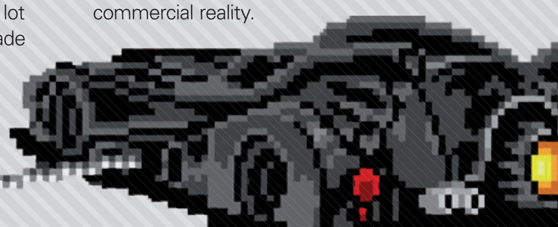
What Ocean game should be remade for the modern age?
I'd love to see the likes of *Wizball* reimagined for current technology. Bear in mind though, that these titles were tailored to the hardware, so I don't think you're going to get a much better experience if it's graphically enhanced. I think they're games of their day and we've moved on.

Why did Ocean have a Time Pilot arcade machine in their basement arcade when it never had the licence of the game?
I don't remember us having *Time Pilot*. In fact, I think that's probably a myth because we didn't have a lot of space in what we called 'arcade alley'. We basically had two fixed cabinets and we used to change the PCBs and put whatever games were currently being developed or converted at the time inside the cabinets. Occasionally someone – one of the lads – would buy one and want to try it out and play around with it. Brian Flannigan was really into coin-ops so he'd buy them, connect the PCB and it would be around for people to play until we needed the cab for the next project.

What happened to *Highlander*, terrific licence, not a great game?
What we tried to do, and this is really stretching my memory, was take all these fighting games like *Street Fighter*, *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* and *Renegade*, which were all very popular, and do it with the sword fighting. But you don't get as much variety with a sword as you do with hand-to-hand combat and martial arts weapons. It was a concept that went wrong and I'll hold my hands up because I loved the original film, and I regret that because it was a licence that deserved a better game.



Did you think an off-the-wall game like *Wizball* was a risk?
I didn't, I loved it, and I remember being its greatest advocate. I had to really push it because the sales people didn't get it. I [often] got upset that a lot of the games we were releasing weren't very good because they were licences and we were shovelling them out as we had deadlines to meet. And then along came a game that was truly innovative and truly different and I felt very passionate about it. I think maybe I let my personal feelings get in the way of the commercial reality.



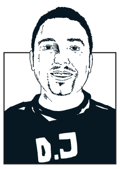


COWBOY SHOOTOUT

ROOTIN, TOOTIN AND PLENTY OF SHOOTIN



- **PUBLISHER:** MICRO POWER
- **RELEASED:** 1983
- **GENRE:** ARCADE ACTION
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** BBC MICRO
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2+



HISTORY

The reality of real-life cowboys was very different from how they were depicted on television and in books and movies. Having said that, it's easy to see why so many kids – me included – were so keen on strapping on a plastic six-shooter and riding a fake horse in our back gardens. Cowboys are damned cool.

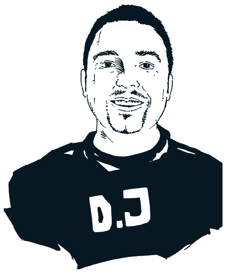
Admittedly, they're not quite up there with pirates or ninjas, but the chance to sleep under a starry night's sky and then ride hell for leather with a posse of your best men while taking part in dangerous shootouts with your most hated enemy certainly does have its appeal.

Indeed, 34 years since it first appeared as the main entertainment of Taito's *Western Gun*, the shootout has been a constant source of entertainment in the videogame industry, with Ubisoft's *Call Of Juarez: Bound In Blood* the most recent example. For now though, our focus is on the charming *Cowboy Shootout*, a fun offering by Program Power that pitted two sharp-shooters against each other in a fight to the bloody death.

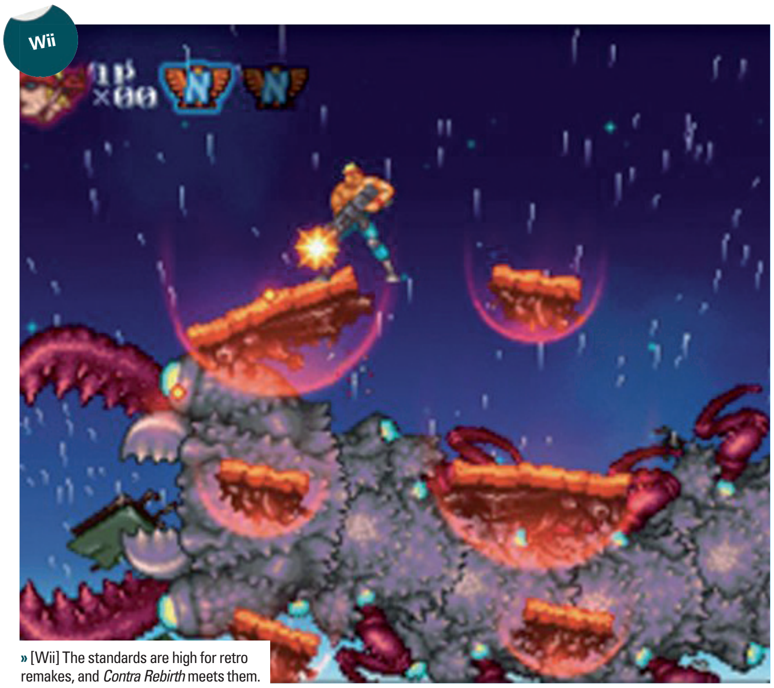
Relying on nothing more than the A and Z keys for movement, the aim was to run up and down the screen, taking pot shots at your opponent (AI or human) before he did the same to you. Cacti and rolling wagons stood between you and your foe, so a surprising amount of skill was needed if you wanted to successfully shoot down your foe. While both wagons and cacti can be used for temporary cover, the latter will slowly get shredded by bullets as the face-offs progress, although the upside to this is that if you time shots carefully you can shoot through the gaps.

Fun and fast paced and with ten levels of difficulty, *Cowboy Shootout* is a surprisingly enjoyable fun game and definitely worth seeking out if you have access to a BBC Micro. The visuals are certainly basic and the stodgy controls do take a little while to get the hang of, but it's a small price to pay for a barrel load of fun.


DIFF
5
GAMES
0



» It's another digital download intensive month this issue. Worry not, though, as there are some truly cracking titles around, including a magnificent addition to the Contra series. We've never had it so good...



» [Wii] The standards are high for retro remakes, and *Contra Rebirth* meets them.



✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Contra Rebirth

» Like many conversions, the NES version of *Contra* differs greatly from its arcade parent.

» The UK box art for *Contra* – or *Gryzor*, as it was known – features men who look suspiciously like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone.

» The PAL NES version of *Contra* is known as *Probotector* and replaces the beefcakes Lance and Bill with two robots.



Contra Rebirth

IT'S NO CONTRA 4, BUT IT'S STILL AWESOME

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WiiWARE
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 1,000 POINTS
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

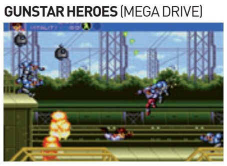
BRIEF HISTORY

» The *Contra* series has now been running and gunning for 22 years and has appeared on a variety of systems, from the ZX Spectrum to Nintendo's DS. It's best known for its unrelenting toughness, big muscular leads and its name change to *Gryzor* and *Probotector* in the UK.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

GUNSTAR HEROES (MEGA DRIVE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW

METAL SLUG 7 (DS)





After being suitably impressed with Konami's re-imagining of *Gradius* last month, the company has now decided to revisit its excellent *Contra* series. While not quite up to the same wonderful standards of *Contra III*, nor indeed the DS's *Contra 4*, it's nevertheless a fantastic addition to the franchise.

As with the *Gradius* update, *Contra Rebirth* will feel instantly familiar to followers of the series, due to the fantastic homage it pays to its predecessors. There are rides on rockets, a host of bizarre bosses to battle, dangerous vertical climbs up huge buildings, and much, much more. One minute you're racing for your life through an enemy-strewn corridor; the next you're taking on a huge snake boss while standing on continually crumbling platforms. The action on display in *Contra Rebirth* is fast, frantic and, above all, relentless.

It's also damn hard. Not soul-destroyingly so, but, as with previous *Contra* games, the wusses out there may want to opt for the easiest difficulty setting, if only so they can see some of the later levels, which are truly spectacular, both in their scope and their actual design. Indeed, it's the sheer amount of care and attention that's obviously been poured into *Contra Rebirth* that makes us love it so much. As with *Gradius Rebirth*, the visuals feel somewhere between the NES and SNES, and they look absolutely delicious. Sprites are beautifully animated, with the bosses in particular being amazingly detailed, while a huge number of fancy effects and graphical tricks have been thrown into the mix. It's like Mode 7 on steroids!

Gameplay-wise it is business as usual, with all the usual power-ups, ranging from homing missiles to spread shots, in addition to a variety of control choices. Collision detection – always massively important in games such as this – is perfect and bullets are bright pink and thus easy to avoid, while the weapon patterns of the game's many bosses are as imaginative as the behemoths that are spewing them out at you.

OPINION



Now this is how you update a classic game for new hardware. *Contra Rebirth* keeps everything that made the past *Contra* games fun while also throwing in loads of new ideas that suit the franchise brilliantly. It may be slightly on the short side, but it's also very, very sweet.

Ashley Day

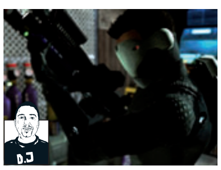
In a nutshell

It's a little short, but this is a worthy addition to the franchise and a fantastic blaster in its own right. Let's hope more rebirths follow.

» Scores

Presentation	62%
Graphics	88%
Sound	90%
Playability	82%
Addictivity	85%
Overall	**86%**

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Shadow Complex

The best Metroidvania game on a home system for absolutely ages. Brilliant.



STUART

The King Of Fighters '98

We've been spoilt for excellent fighters of late and this can certainly be added to the pile.



ASHLEY

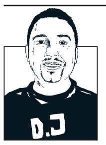
Contra Rebirth

Contra 4 may still not be out in Europe, but at least we've got this beauty.

Worms

TEAM17'S ANNELIDS CRAWL TO THE iPHONE

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBLA/PSN » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PUBLISHER:** TEAM17 » **DEVELOPER:** TEAM17 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4



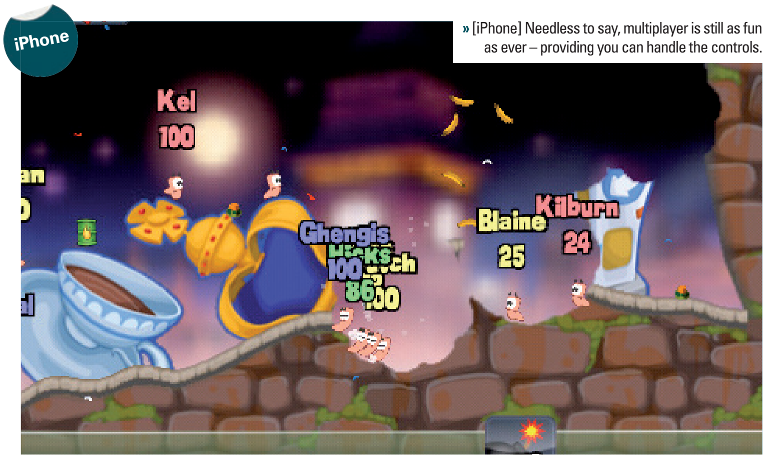
***Worms* is arguably Team17's biggest success story and has pretty much been ported to more systems than we've had hot dinners. It was only a matter of time, then, before the iPhone version arrived, and while it's the best version compared to the many clones that are already available on the system, it falls far short of various iterations of the game.**

Unsurprisingly it's the iPhone's interface that's the problem here, with the touch screen failing to do the classic game justice. Hats off to Team17 for doing the best it could with it, but *Worms* becomes nothing more than an exercise in frustration if you play it on anything other than the easiest difficulty setting. It's far too easy to fluff up jumps or shots, meaning that much of the game's charm and strategy is lost due to no fault of your own.

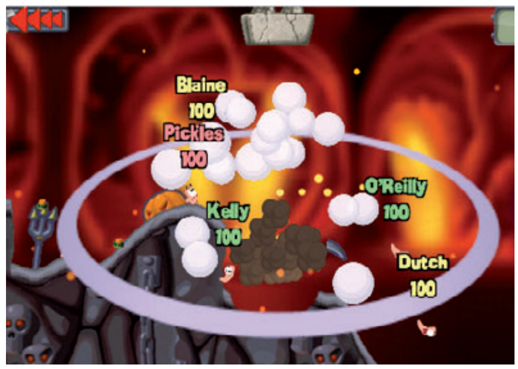
Gameplay-wise it's the same as ever, with your standard single-player match, the ability to play against friends and a solid set of challenges, which, again, suffer due to the iPhone interface's inability to handle the intricate and precise controls that *Worms* needs in order to succeed without becoming frustrating. There's a lovely selection of the game's signature nutty weapons to choose from and the cartoon graphics look absolutely wonderful on the tiny screen, while the worms themselves remain as charming as ever. What a pity, then, that the hardware itself just isn't up to providing a satisfying *Worms* experience.

» Scores

Presentation	73%
Graphics	85%
Sound	76%
Playability	55%
Addictivity	60%
Overall	**66%**



» [iPhone] Needless to say, multiplayer is still as fun as ever – providing you can handle the controls.



OPINION



The controls are a bit fiddly, granted, but this is still the best artillery game on the iPhone and it's one that Team17 is constantly tweaking with updates. For its flaws, it's a portable *Worms* that I can carry with me, so I'm not complaining.

Ashley Day



Heavy Weapon

» **SYSTEM:** PSN
» **PRICE:** £6.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

» **Another XBLA release** gets dusted down for the PS3. Taking control of a souped-up tank, you're required to reach the enemy's base and take out the huge bosses that reside at the end of each stage. Along the way you're constantly assaulted by an assortment of vehicles intent on raining molten death upon you. Fast, frantic fun, especially with four players, *Heavy Weapon* is a fun, if vacuous, blaster.

» Score **70%**



Pinball Fantasies

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £3.49 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **After impressing us** with *Pinball Dreams*, Cowboy Rodeo is back with another excellent Amiga port, this time of *Pinball Fantasies*. The four tables are still great fun to play on and the ball physics and controls are spot on, while the enhanced graphics – the originals are still available – and music simply help confirm what Amiga owners knew 17 years ago. Namely that *Pinball Fantasies* is awesome.

» Score **91%**

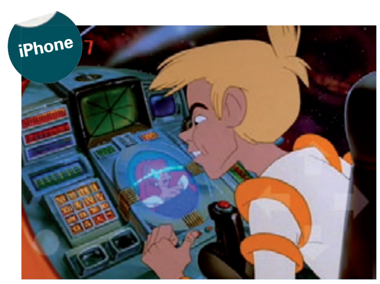


Bomberman '94

» **SYSTEM:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **PRICE:** 700 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-5

» **How fortuitous.** No sooner do we cover the *Bomberman* series does one of its best games get released on the Virtual Console. This is the PC-Engine effort and it's absolutely sensational. A fun campaign, plenty of new additions like the wonderful Looeys, and frantic five-player action. Easily the best pre-*Saturn Bomberman* release and an absolute bargain for the pathetically small asking price.

» Score **94%**



Space Ace

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **It's quite possible** that this is the finest iteration of the cult LaserDisc classic since it first arrived in arcades. Providing you stay away from the screen-prompting and shorter Cadet mode, you'll discover that the entire arcade game has been crammed into just 250MB. Add in short load times, intuitive controls and its bargain price and *Space Ace* becomes a charming, if simple, addition to your library.

» Score **73%**

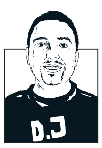
DrawRace

LIKE SUPER SPRINT, ONLY NOT

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 59P » **PUBLISHER:** REDLYNX » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-3



» [iPhone] It sounds simple, but drawing the best route can be surprisingly tricky.



The top-down racer has endured for decades now, but never have we come across an addition to the genre this original before. Races aren't in real-time but instead require you to draw a route through the cunningly designed tracks with your finger. Once your route has been drawn out, the race begins and you'll see your miniature vehicle face off against an opposing car. Beat it and you move on to the next of 20 gruelling stages.

It's an amazingly simple idea that works brilliantly thanks to the iPhone's touch interface and the way your car's speed is directly related to how quickly you drag your finger across the screen. While gently tracing your finger around the track can ensure you'll take each corner at optimum speed and stick to the racing line like glue, you've no hope of ever bettering the computer by doing it like that.



Games become a frantic race, then, as you try to work out the best racing line – just as you would with any racer, basically – in order to shave precious seconds off your best time. With ghost support, the ability to play online or on the same device with three other players, and a fun league mode, *DrawRace* is a refreshingly addictive game that proves that even the oldest genres can be taken in exciting new directions. If you don't pay the meagre 59p asking price, you don't deserve to own Apple's machine. It's that simple.

OPINION



It's questionable how often you'll return to it after you've beaten all 20 included tracks – although more tracks are apparently on the way – but there's no denying that this is a wonderfully original little game while it lasts. How can you argue with its 59p asking price?

Stuart Hunt

» Scores

Presentation	78%
Graphics	70%
Sound	65%
Playability	87%
Addictivity	80%

Overall 81%



» [XBLA] It wouldn't be a *King Of Fighters* game without Terry Bogard kicking some ass.

The King Of Fighters '98

SNK PLAYMORE CONTINUES ITS ONLINE ASSAULT

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** SNK PLAYMORE » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-2



We're so glad we have a pair of Hori sticks, because they've been getting a right hammering these past few months. *Street Fighter IV* rarely leaves our Xbox's disc drive, while Live Arcade offers us the stunning *Garou*, *Street Fighter II HD Remix*, *Marvel Vs Capcom 2*, and now, *King Of Fighters '98* courtesy of SNK.

As with *Garou*, this is another stunning conversion that appears identical to the MVS original. Background graphics are full of variety and change with the beginning of each bout; fighters, of which there are an impressive 43 to choose from, are exceptionally well animated; while the raucous effects and punchy tunes suit the action perfectly.

Generally considered one of the best entries in the franchise, *KOF '98* is laden with a variety of gameplay modes allowing for team-based or one-on-one scraps, a practice arena,



an endless mode and a series of challenges that will really test your skills, not to mention your stick. There's even a mode that emulates the original Neo Geo game, meaning that SNK Playmore has pretty much thought of everything.

Netcode, as with *Garou*, isn't perfect, but we've rarely had drop-outs. It does suffer from balance issues and it looks a little rusty when compared directly to the magnificent *Garou*, but this is nevertheless another Live Arcade must-own for beat-'em-up fans.

OPINION



You can't turn on a 360 without seeing a new beat-'em-up these days, so it's possible you might be a little bored of them, which is a shame, as *KOF '98* is a damn good fighter. You might not want to play it now, but you definitely will once the fatigue wears off.

Ashley Day

» Scores

Presentation	78%
Graphics	90%
Sound	79%
Playability	92%
Addictivity	82%

Overall 89%

Another Code R: A Journey Into Lost Memory

UNLIKE A BAD BOOK YOU CAN'T RIP THIS UP

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** Wii » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO » **DEVELOPER:** CING » **PLAYERS:** 1



Well, this is rather depressing. After laughing ourselves silly last month thanks to *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and *Sam & Max Save The World*, we've had to suffer this miserable effort from Cing. The last *Another Code* was a charming adventure for the DS that fused an absorbing story with clever use of the DS's hardware features to create a highly entertaining adventure. This time around, however, Cing has turned the teenage angst up to 11, created a truly dull storyline and allowed heroine Ashley Robbins to interact with some completely bland and forgettable characters.

Considering how creative Cing's DS effort was, this feels like a huge step backwards, with the Japanese developer seemingly intent on focusing on bratty, unlikable characters, rather than honing *Another Code R*'s simplistic yet perfectly functional gameplay. The game's puzzles are admittedly well created, with quite a few head-scratchers to contend with, but they come along so rarely that you'll often find yourself wondering if you'd have been better off reading a novel by Jacqueline Wilson.

It's frustrating that *Another Code R* is so lacking, as the easy-to-use controls and glorious visuals go a long way to make you want to persevere and reach its lacklustre conclusion. There are plenty of great point-and-click adventures around at the moment – especially on WiiWare courtesy of Telltale Games – but this isn't one of them. Steer well clear.

» Scores

Presentation	70%
Graphics	90%
Sound	65%
Playability	52%
Addictivity	35%
Overall	**49%**

» [Wii] Love aimlessly running from one beautiful locale to the next? Then you'll love this.







OPINION

I loved the first *Another Code* game on the DS so I was looking forward to trying out the Wii version. Sadly, it's let me down. There's far too much boring dialogue without anything really to do and the story just goes round in circles. Poor show, Cing.

Ashley Day



Sonic The Hedgehog 3

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 400 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1 -2

» **Some people will** tell you that *Sonic 3* is one of the best games in the franchise. We won't. It's a solid, fun platformer, and can look absolutely lovely in places, but it just doesn't thrill us in the same way *Sonic 2* did. Still, fans will defend this regardless of what we think, and there's no denying its bargain price point.

» Score **80%**

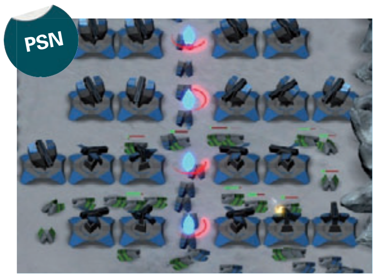


Myst

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **For many, *Myst*** was an absolutely groundbreaking experience when they first played it on the PC. While this iPhone update doesn't quite impress in the same way, it's nevertheless an extremely slick effort that makes great use of the machine's touch screen. It's still as unforgiving as ever – later puzzles are ridiculously difficult – and hasn't aged that well, but it remains an experience worth returning to.

» Score **70%**



Comet Crash

» **SYSTEM:** PSN
» **PRICE:** $9.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

» **Tower defence games** on PSN are few and far between. That's good news for *Comet Crash*, which obliterates the opposition thanks to slick visuals and a raft of excellent new ideas. A three-player co-op mode, cool *Thrust*-inspired visuals, brilliant resource management and offensive units all combine to create the best example of the genre currently available on Sony's machine. Don't miss it.

» Score **88%**



Streets Of Rage

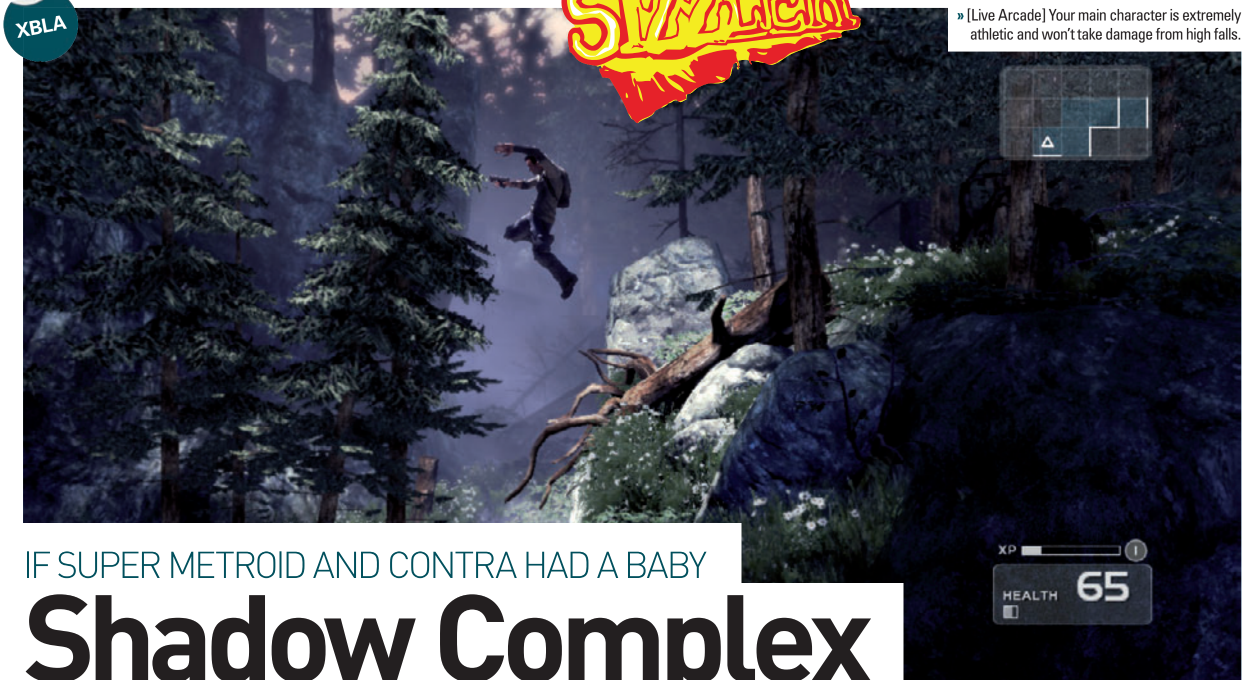
» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Sega, what are** you doing to your precious back catalogue? If you can't create a half-decent Mega Drive emulator for the iPhone then you really should stop now before you ruin any more childhood memories. Sluggish, clunky and an awkward nightmare to play, this version of *Streets Of Rage* is a world away from the Mega Drive original – so much so that it makes us weep. Avoid!

» Score **38%**

» SHADOW COMPLEX

XBLA



» [Live Arcade] Your main character is extremely athletic and won't take damage from high falls.

INFORMATION

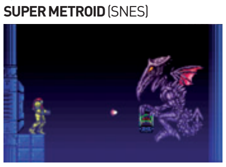
» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS
» **PUBLISHER:** EPIC GAMES
» **DEVELOPER:** CHAIR ENTERTAINMENT
» **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» The term 'Metroidvania' refers to games that require you to explore huge, labyrinthine environments by utilising a variety of items and weapons along the way. It changed the traditional action-adventure format by doing away with individual levels and scores and introducing the speedrun.

★WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SUPER METROID (SNES)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
CASTLEVANIA: ORDER OF ECCLESIA (DS)



★ GO DEEPER

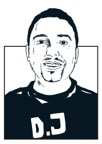
The facts behind Shadow Complex

» ***Shadow Complex*'s entertaining script is written by *Star Trek* novelist and comic book writer Peter David.**

» **This is Chair's second title and it's a world away from its dull underwater team-based blaster *Undertow*. Both titles use the Unreal Engine 3.**

IF SUPER METROID AND CONTRA HAD A BABY

Shadow Complex



Chair's *Shadow Complex* is one of those rare games that perfectly manages to mix superlative visuals with old-school mechanics.

The uninformed or those looking at the screenshots we've chosen will probably write this off as yet another space marine blaster and wonder what the hell it's doing being covered in **Retro Gamer**. The uninformed will be missing out.

At its heart, *Shadow Complex* is nothing more than a very polished Metroidvania clone and, considering how rarely they now come along, it immediately deserves your attention. Yes, it has a few niggling annoyances, and yes, it features lots of metallic monstrosities and plenty of oversized guns, but this is not your typical Westernised shooter.

What starts as a fairly generic story – girlfriend gets captured and boyfriend turns out to be a highly trained killer – takes plenty of interesting twists and turns and the execution in general is well above the usual Live Arcade fare, giving Chair's game a really epic feel.

Entertaining storyline aside, it's the game we're really interested in, and *Shadow Complex* certainly doesn't disappoint. The real beauty comes from discovering the many hidden nooks and crannies of Chair's stunningly designed world. There's nothing more satisfying than shooting your way through a grate, crawling along an unused shaft then reappearing in an area you've previously visited. To further the exploration you actually gain experience from discovering new areas instead of laying waste to the complex's many enemies. Very satisfying.

In fact, the only element that really lets *Shadow Complex* down is its occasionally ropey combat. Using the now-traditional twin-stick method that so many Live Arcade games have, enemies often appear in the background and can be a real bugger to take out. It's a real pity that later sections of the game feature loads of these sneaky assailants, as they can quickly rob you of your precious health, making certain sections and boss encounters needlessly difficult to complete. It's a small fly in an otherwise flawless ointment, however.



Absolutely glorious to look at and featuring some truly amazing boss battles, *Shadow Complex* is arguably one of the most technically impressive games to appear on Live Arcade. Let's hope Konami and Nintendo get to play it as we'd love a *Castlevania* or *Metroid* to look like this.



» [Live Arcade] Visually *Shadow Complex* looks astoundingly good. It's easily the best-looking game on Live Arcade.

OPINION



I'm a huge fan of Metroidvania games, so I've been absolutely gagging to play *Shadow Complex*. I've not been disappointed either thanks to some superlative visuals, plenty of clever touches and some of the most refreshing set pieces I've seen on Live Arcade. Make no mistake, you need this game.

Stuart Hunt

In a nutshell

The combat occasionally suffers, but this is a truly stunning title that breathes fresh new life into one of our favourite sub-genres. Let's hope a sequel quickly gets greenlit, as this is all sorts of amazing.

» Scores

Presentation	90%
Graphics	98%
Sound	85%
Playability	85%
Addictivity	92%
Overall	**90%**

» THE KING OF FIGHTERS XII

PS3



» [PS3] There's no denying the backgrounds look exquisite, but at times it does feel that the characters have simply been plonked over some pretty, animated wallpaper.

★ GO DEEPER

The facts behind The King Of Fighters XII

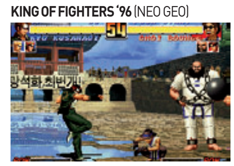
» The home console versions feature two new characters over the arcade port: Mature and Elisabeth Blanctorche.

» Like *KOF '98* and *KOF 2002*, *KOF XII* does not include a story.

★ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

KING OF FIGHTERS '96 [NEO GEO]



▽ SOMETHING NEW

BLAZBLUE [360/PS3]





SNK'S LATEST IS A CLASSIC CASE OF STYLE OVER SUBSTANCE

The King Of Fighters XII


S.H

We have been anxiously awaiting *The King Of Fighters XII*'s arrival. Those early images of the game, showing the beautiful hand-drawn fighters beating nine bells out of each other against equally beautiful backgrounds had us thinking that it could be the most dazzling 2D fighter ever. Sadly, this just isn't the case.

We'll try to give you a quick summation of our main gripes. Firstly, with just one offline mode – a time-attack championship stretching a measly five rounds – the game feels incredibly light. Also, like *KOF '98* and *2002*, there's been no real effort to add any kind of story to tie the fights together and no classic end boss to draw things to a dramatic close.

Second, given this odd decision by SNK Playmore to transform *KOF* into this weird time-attack championship, the fights just feel far too easy. Even on the highest difficulty setting we finished the game in seven minutes, and rarely did we need to bust out our second fighter either!

More tragically than all that, though, is the fact that, owing to a small number of characters (22), there's no sense of there being any teams in the game, further highlighted by not having your team-mates impatiently tapping their feet on the sidelines as they wait. If we had to compare *KOF XII* to any of SNK's fight franchises, we'd say it looks and plays more like *Art Of Fighting*, owing to its chunkier aesthetics, which isn't typical.

Despite our criticisms, though, *KOF XII* is still enjoyable, blessed with a system that is both solid and rewarding. With just four attack buttons, plus parries, charge blows, evasive rolls and a new counter manoeuvre that leaves your opponent open to a barrage of attacks, all accessed through a combination of two face buttons and direction pad pushes, it makes the game immediately playable and easy for newcomers to pick up.

Overall, *KOF XII* has some good elements but this is far from the best in the series. If it were a download game and its price reflected that, then its score would probably be fetching somewhere up in the low 80s, but it isn't. It's a shame, too, as we were really looking forward to this one.

INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £39.99
- **PUBLISHER:** IGNITION
- **DEVELOPER:** SNK PLAYMORE
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» Beginning with *King Of Fighters '94*, *KOF* was a beat-'em-up series by SNK that borrowed fighters from its other beat-'em-up franchises – most notably *Fatal Fury* and *Art Of Fighting* – and utilised a unique three-on-three last-team-standing mechanic to its fighting. The series highlights are widely considered to be *KOF '96* and *'98*, which both covered the series' 'Orochi saga' story thread.

OPINION


D.J

It certainly looks glorious, but after being bowled over by *BlazBlue*, this has left me rather cold. The small roster and lack of teams and main mode makes this feel more like a download than the full-priced release it is. Enjoyable, but there are far better examples available.

Darran Jones

In a nutshell

It's a tricky one. Overall the game is pretty good, but we hoped for something so much better. For a full-price title many will feel a little short-changed by the lack of offline options and fans are likely to feel put out by the un-*KOF*-ness of this latest episode.

» Scores

Presentation	56%
Graphics	86%
Sound	80%
Playability	89%
Addictivity	75%

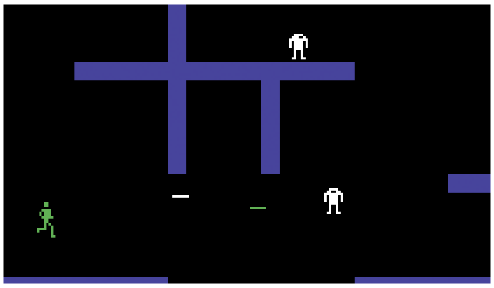
Overall 68%

HOMEBREW

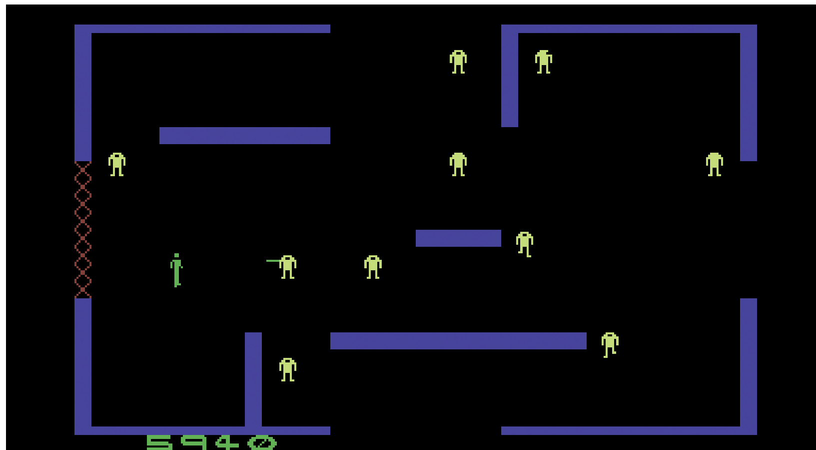
» The scene's latest news and reviews



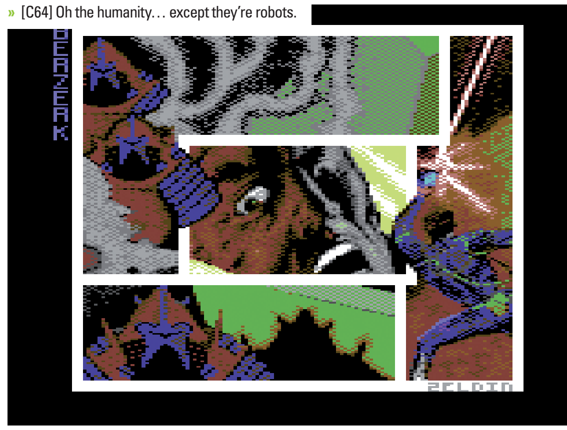
It's the month for remakes apparently, because recently there have been versions of Berzerk on C64, Pipe Mania on Game Boy Advance, Warhawk on DS and we have news of both a devolved version of Portal and a super-charged Space Invaders coming for PC along with Quake 3 for Commodore PET. Okay, that last one was actually quite a big fib...



» [C64] Oh no, run away, run away!



» [C64] Like rush hour in London with killer robots.



» [C64] Oh the humanity… except they're robots.



INTRUDER ALERT! INTRUDER ALERT!

BERZERK REDUX



FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
DEVELOPED BY: MARTIN PIPER
LINK: HTTP://NONAME.C64.ORG/CSDB/RELEASE/?ID=80567
RELEASE DATE: 2009
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

The story behind this unofficial C64 conversion of Stern's coin-op *Berzerk* is unusual in that it begins with a forum posting. And while that might not sound particularly exceptional, quite a few of these 'I'd like to see' posts appear on the message boards for format-specific websites such as Atari Age or World Of Spectrum, usually written by non-programmers who want to see a specific title converted to their favourite platform. This particular thread started on the C64 Scene Database (something of a specialist website that, since it deals with the Commodore 64 demoscene specifically, tends to be particularly programming orientated) because the source code for a version of *Berzerk* had been released onto the web and the poster wanted to see it shovelled into the C64.

These threads pretty much always grind to a shuddering halt not long after starting, the process of converting code from one 8-bit machine to another is remarkably complex and time-consuming even if the two machines bear some similarities, but this time programmer Martin Piper, who has previously pulled apart Sensible Software's *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* and improved its innards to produce his *SEUCK Redux*, stepped up to the plate. After deciding that the supplied code wasn't going to be helpful because the differences between the hardware it was written for and the Commodore 64 are too great, he resorted instead to writing the entire thing from scratch.

And that has resulted in an impressive piece of work, although C64 has previously seen clones of the game in the past, nothing has come close to the level of detail within *Berzerk Redux*. The in-game graphics have been kept as close to the original as possible and the synthesised speech during play has been carried over so the villain of the piece Evil Otto will announce himself by saying "intruder alert" before making a dash for the player and call after them to "fight like a robot" should they leave a screen before destroying all the robots.

The action itself is straightforward enough: kill or be killed. Upon entering a room, the door used for entry closes and the robots begin eyeing your character up. To begin with, their reaction is simply to ram into the player, which, since everything in the game is electrified, is of course fatal. But as you progress through the screens they become increasingly aggressive and it doesn't take too long before they stop merely jostling around – and being destroyed amusingly when they bump into each other – and start firing back. Thankfully, the player's bullets can shoot their projectiles out of the air.

What makes *Berzerk Redux* even more interesting is the prospect of the enhanced version Martin has been planning. The graphics are to be beefed up, the sound improved (with the speech gaining some clarity) and even the possibility of boss areas as well, all of which make it sound like the *Smash TV* to *Berzerk Redux*'s *Robotron*, and something to look forward to.

89%

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

ISORA

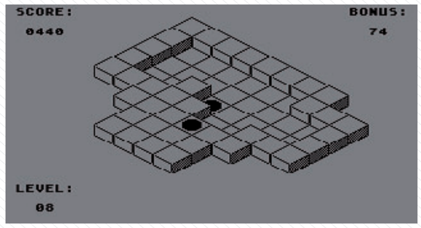
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

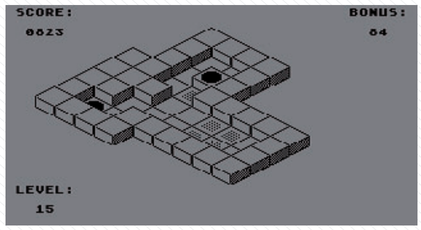
» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** XXL » **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.ATARIAGE.COM/FORUMS/INDEX.PHP?SHOWTOPIC=144920 » **PRICE:** FREE

Based on the Flash game it shares a title with, *Isora* is an isometric 3D puzzle game. The player controls a block with a spot on top that starts each level in a hollowed-out channel, and by moving from cell to cell and causing the floor tiles to elevate up as it passes, convert the area into a flat plane, always making sure that it finishes up back at the starting point. As the game progresses through its 26 levels, new tiles are introduced that need to be passed multiple times before rising up.

As with *W*H*B* (another isometric game reviewed a couple of months back, this time for Spectrum), *Isora* is very much a thinker's puzzle game and although there is a bonus counter ominously ticking down on screen, running out of time isn't penalised, and along with being able to rotate the play area, the pause menu offers the option of resetting the current level (but not the bonus) should the player get stuck.

84%





» I'll have a P please, Bob.





» [CPC] Yeeeeah! 'Ello, rat fans.

SEWER RAT

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC » **DEVELOPER:** LACHLAN KEOWN
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.CPCWIKI.COM/INDEX.PHP/SEWER_RAT » **PRICE:** FREE

Gordon, a sewer rat recently kicked out by his mum, has been scavenging around for cheese in order to survive. Fortunately, he's found huge chunks of the stuff just lying about the place, but these cheddar-laden locations are roamed by cats, snakes and the odd Tyrannosaurus Rex, contact with which will all drain Gordon's life force. And if the local fauna wasn't enough to deal with, alien beings have invaded and, if one grabs a wedge of milk-related foodstuff before our ratty friend can reach it, that's one life lost.

Sadly, along with some levels being arranged so that the player must react in a certain way almost the moment they start moving to avoid having their energy drained (or in one case watching helplessly as an alien legs it inexorably towards a piece of cheese), *Sewer Rat* has some serious issues with its collision detection being overly accurate, so navigating around involves repeatedly getting stuck against the landscape as a pursuer bears down on Gordon.

51%

STRIP OFF

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 2600 » **DEVELOPER:** TACTICAL NEURONICS
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.TACTICALNEURONICS.COM/CONTENT/ATARISTRIPOFF.ASP

High in the sky above your home world sit the glowing, neon-coloured blocks of the defence grid positioned there to ward off any creatures that might invade from nearby planets. With each part being completely impervious to energy weapons and able to critically wound an advancing battle craft, it was the perfect defensive system… until the weakness was discovered. There was nothing to stop the aliens from simply stealing the thing, one block at a time.

So the player's job is to shoot down these lone invaders as they arrive from the edges of the screen, intent on stealing the grid. And while that sounds simple, the little darlings move like Olympic sprinters so it's almost a certainty that the first couple of bricks will go almost without time to react until the game becomes a desperate but still enjoyable scramble to save the rest before the defences have been totally depleted.

69%





» [Atari 2600] Oi, I was using that.

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Vic-20] You'll need an expanded Vic to run this beast.

» The Psytronik Dungeons

Those little goblins at Psytronik have been busy again, working on a nearly completed disk-based release for VIC 20 called *Realms Of Quest*. In fact, the disk will contain the three games of the series, with the lead title being the rather beefy *Realms Of Quest III*, which requires a 32K expanded VIC to run (although a scaled-back 16K version is included). More information is available from **http://www.psytronik.com**.



» [ZX Spectrum] This is now available for free. Yay!

» Magical Headwear

Originally published by Relevo Videogames on cassette, *La Corona Encantada* on Spectrum was originally developed for MSX by MSXDev stalwart Karoshi Corp and subsequently converted. Previously it was only available to buy on Spectrum, but is now available for free download (the real media release can still be purchased). Further info and the download itself can be found in the World Of Spectrum archives **http://www.worldofspectrum.org/infoseekid.cgi?id=0023326**.



» [ZX81] Paul Allen Panks' work lives on.

» Paul Allen Panks RIP

We were saddened to hear about the passing of Paul Allen Panks, who died at the beginning of July, aged 33. Sometimes working under the pseudonym Dunric, he was best known in both the homebrew and interactive fiction circles for his Westfront and Vampyre Cross series of text adventures. We offer our condolences to Paul's family. His website is still available: **http://ppanks76.tripod.com**.

HOMEBREW

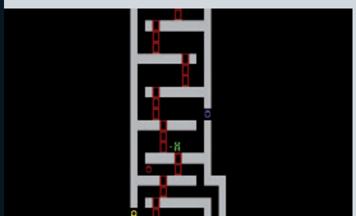
» The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

» Whether You're A Mother

Everyone likes *Portal*, but if you are, for some reason, the kind of person who fancies seeing it in 2D and rendered from ASCII characters as though the game were running in MSDOS you won't be left wanting much longer because ASCIIpOrtal is making its way to a PC near you. It's currently being beta tested and still actively under development (the link below might not always be operational due to the huge interest ASCIIpOrtal has recently been generating) and the preview videos make it look very enticing indeed. **http://cymonsgames.retroremakes.com/too-much-of-anything**.



» [DOS] It's *Portal*, but as you've never seen it before. Could *Half-Life 2* be just around the corner?

» Amy, Tend To The Widow Pac-Man

One of the ongoing projects at Retro Remakes that should be fantastic is a version of *Space Invaders*. No, bear with me because *Invaders! Possibly From Space!* is based on that episode of *Futurama* in which Fry takes on the forces of planet Nintendo 64! Hopefully the owners of *Futurama's* rights will see the funny side when this is released. There's some footage of the game over on **YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BqLbenNzfQ**.

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer's** Flash game of the month. This month we look at

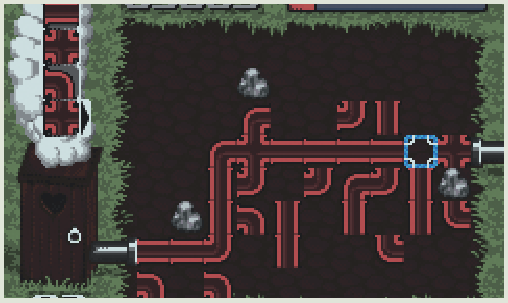
Dungeons And Dungeons

Dungeons and those who dwell within…

A GAME ABOUT dungeons and those who dwell within… but despite similarities to *Castlevania*, these dungeons aren't populated by vampires. It's whip-cracking platform action with an adult sense of humour (don't look if at work) and lots of hidden areas to discover. Head over to **http://www.adultswim.com/games/game/index.html?game=dungeons**.

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING…

Remake of the Month



POOMANIA

» **DOWNLOAD:** HTTP://PDROMS.DE/NEWS/18145/

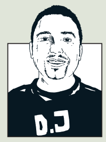


Although the original *Pipe Mania* was all about constructing sewer channels, no version is quite as literal as *Poomania*. Rather than building some nondescript system for goo, the player is charged with plumbing an outside loo into the sewer system before the occupant pulls the chain. Successfully dealing with the discharge results in a flushed-looking plumber, but if the contents of the privy are… er, dumped before the pipes have been laid he's less than pleased. Okay, it's a *Pipe Mania* clone with scatological references – no surprise considering developer Metalvotze's reputation – but at the same time amusing enough that they don't adversely affect this solid GBA rendition of the game.



TriTANGLE

» **DOWNLOAD:** HTTP://WWW.PEEJAYS-REMAKES.CO.UK/



TriTangle is about triangular tessellation. The game offers up a 'shop' of pieces and a frame to fill by positioning them so that the colours at their corners correspond with those around them. If a piece is 'held' by the player for too long or placed incorrectly it explodes, taking non-matching neighbours with it in the latter case.

Despite the timers and the up-tempo soundtrack, *TriTangle* isn't an arcade-style puzzle and instead requires a lot of forward planning and consideration to get anywhere. Slapping shapes into the frame will usually produce situations where the required triangle isn't available because it previously exploded. This makes *TriTangle* somewhat frustrating for some, but for those who enjoy slow-burning puzzle challenges it'll be worth trying out.





» [DS] We want more blasters on the DS.

WARHAWK

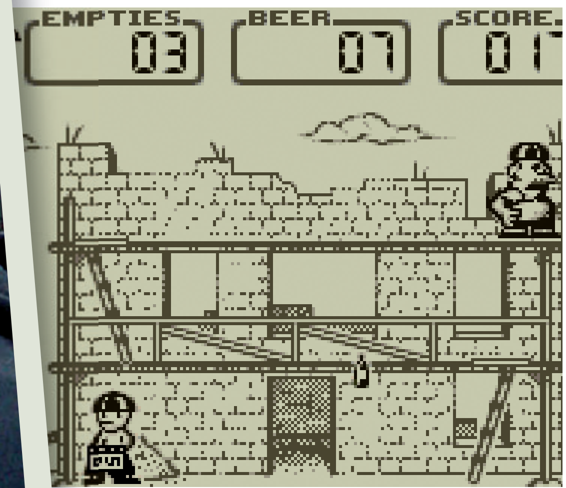
» **DOWNLOAD:** HTTP://HEADSOFT.COM.AU/INDEX.PHP?CATEGORY=WARHAWK



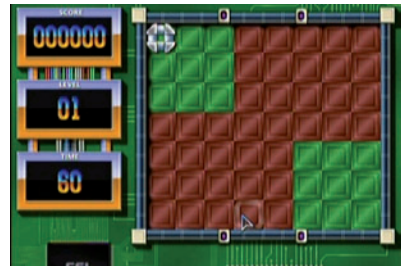
The original Warhawk, released on C64 and then converted to Amstrad CPC, Atari 8-bit and ST, is a budget classic that combined no-nonsense vertical blasting with a thumping Rob Hubbard soundtrack, decent bias relief background graphics, and, for the 8-bit versions at least, an enticing £2 price tag. This incarnation for DS, however, isn't strictly a straight remake. Instead the developers (one of which was behind the C64 version) have ramped up the graphics and sound and made the attack waves busier to take advantage of the Nintendo hardware while also trying to retain the original's spirit.

The work – which included reinstating the boss battles that featured in the prototype versions of *Warhawk* on C64 but not the completed product – has been well worth the developers' attention to detail, because it's great fun to play. The scrolling is beautifully smooth, graphics are detailed and colourful and the two different covers of the original theme by Press Play On Tape and Space Fractal fit the action splendidly. But, of course, the most important thing is how it plays and *Warhawk* on DS is designed to give players a serious fight, but at the same time generous enough with its collisions to still be highly enjoyable to play.









» **Above:** [Game Boy] Beer Belly Bill in all his monochrome glory. » **Top Right:** [GBA] *Trailblazer Advance* is a wonder little remake that's definitely worth tracking down if you've not played it before.

HOMEBREW HEROES

SINCE WE'VE TAKEN A LOOK AT HIS VARIATION ON PIPE MANIA THIS MONTH, DEVELOPER CHRISTIAN WIDMANN – OR WIDDY TO HIS FRIENDS AND, INDEED, JUST ABOUT EVERYONE ELSE – AGREED TO SIT DOWN WITH A CUP OF TEA AND SOME BISCUITS FOR A QUICK CHAT ABOUT HIS LONG AND DISTINGUISHED HISTORY OF GAMES AND DEMOS FOR PLATFORMS RANGING FROM C64 TO Wii

You have developed for a significant number of machines in your time, but what first interested you about programming, and which hardware was the starting point?
The first machine I got was an Atari VCS at the age of six or seven, and right from the beginning the idea of creating my own games absolutely fascinated me. Of course, this was totally impossible back then, with no available documentation or development tools to work with, and this 'great' BASIC cartridge was way too limited, even for a seven-year-old boy.

My first 'real' computer that I received was the Commodore 64. I got it as a Christmas present in 1984 (sort of, my father also thought it would be useful for spreadsheet applications and such), and I started programming it in assembly language in 1985, after I read a rather good tutorial in a special edition of the German magazine *64er*, which came with a type-in macro assembler.

The target platforms for your games are consoles, what particular challenges do these machines present to developers?
Most consoles actually aren't that much of a challenge, but they're exactly the kind of hardware I like. No RAM, no CPU horsepower, but a dedicated graphics subsystem with all the features I dreamed of back in the days. Look at my favourite platform, Game Boy Advance: tons of sprites, several independent tile layers, hardware alpha blending. It's basically arcade hardware from the late-Eighties on steroids. On the other hand, the Wii has no RAM, no CPU horsepower, and a graphics subsystem that is my worst nightmare…

So, would you say that Nintendo's Wii is the worst platform you've worked with?
No. The most limited platform, and therefore the most painful to work with, was the Atari VCS, I just coded a colourful scrolling playfield and gave up. While I like the Wii not as a gamer, nor as a developer, it at least has these wonderful controllers. Too bad nobody really knows how a game would benefit from them.

You seem to have more than a passing interest in certain… adult-orientated themes shall we say, is there a specific reason for that?
Many people from the homebrew scene – and from the demo scene, too – take themselves much too seriously, which isn't me at all. We've been using adult themes, childish and sometimes very tasteless humour for years now to try and shock these people, but I think most people have got what we're trying to do by now. Those who are still complaining usually never released anything at all, or maybe another generic version of *Pong*.

Of the various games you've written over the years, which would be the one you're most proud of and why?
I would probably choose both *Reaxion* and *Beer Belly Bill 3* as they were both simple and enjoyable games, but were also quite polished. *Reaxion* worked very well on Game Boy Advance, and its auto save feature was definately one of my better ideas that I've come up with.

And is there anything you've been meaning to try but haven't had a chance to work on yet?
Goodness, there's lots of different things that I'd like to do. We really have to do *Battle Zone* on Vectrex one day, as that could be excellent. We did some initial tests with the wire frame 3D technique we developed for our demo, *Bresenham*, and I'm pretty sure it would work. I'd also love to do something for Nintendo DS, iPhone or for Xbox Live Arcade. I just don't have enough time for it…

Where do you think the homebrew community's popularity comes from?
I guess many people don't want to consume only, but also create games and applications by themselves. If they're developing for consoles, there's also the thrill of using the hardware in a different way than it was supposed to, which can be very satisfying, especially when you discover a new way of achieving something.

HIGH FIVE

Tell us about your top five favourite new Spectrum games

1 Berzerk Redux (Martin Piper, C64) "Brilliant conversion of the arcade game, more fun than the original. And it also says 'Coin detected in pocket'."

2 Zak McKracken: Between Time And Space (Artificial Hair Bros, PC) "Very professional, and easily the best point-and-click adventure for years."

3 SCUMMVM (SCUMMVM team, various platforms) "I think there is not a single piece of software I have enjoyed more than this."

4 Giana's Return (Rudolphe Boixel, various platforms) "Nice sequel to *Giana Sisters* for many different platforms, pretty graphics and very playable."

5 Frontal Assault (Jere Sanisalo and Jukka Nikkonen, PC) "People expect me to mention it."

BARGAIN HUNT

DESPERATE TO FINISH OFF YOUR RETRO COLLECTION? WANT TO GET YOUR HANDS ON ALL THE BEST BARGAINS BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO? THEN VISIT **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET/BARGAIN_HUNT.PHP** AND DISCOVER ALL THE CLASSIC MACHINES THAT YOU'LL EVER NEED

You've been asking for it forever, but we're pleased to announce a brand new look for **Retro Gamer**'s Buyer's Guide section that makes it incredibly easy to get your hands on all the best retro bargains.

Using our new search engine couldn't be easier. All you need to do is select a manufacturer and machine from the pull-down menu. Once you've found the system you're after, the magic of the internet will search eBay for the top 20 ending items, meaning that you'll be able to gauge the market's health with very little effort. This month, Darran's getting in a bit of Dreamcast action.



Head on over to the excellent **www.retrogamer.net** and click on 'Bargain Hunt' or visit **www.retrogamer.net/bargain_hunt.php**



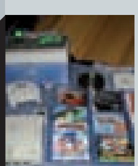
Put in the details for the greatest computer in the world and discuss with your staff writer why it's so much better than the ZX Spectrum.



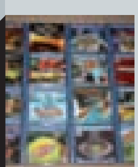
Swoon in delight as you find yourself getting ever closer to collecting all the £1.99 *Simulator* games that Codemasters ever released.

eBAY BARGAINS

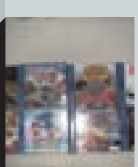
Retro Gamer has been scouring the world's most popular auction site to find the best bargains out there…



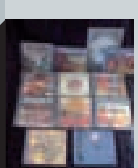
■ Darran was gutted to miss out on this little bundle for £72. Especially when the stick and *Marvel VS Cacpom2* sell seperately for £45 each.



■ On the other hand, he was happy to pick up a DC with 27 games for a measly £48. You won't be able to buy the new *Call of Duty* game for that when it's out.



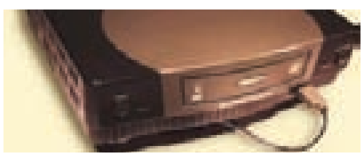
■ *Power Stone 2* sells for £25 whenever we've seen it on the bay. To get it with seven other games, a DC, and two pads for just £17 is a complete bargain.



■ *Dragon Riders* alone sells for £25. Add in *Time Stalkers* and *Grandia* and this £26 lot is another bargain that Darran narrowly missed out on.

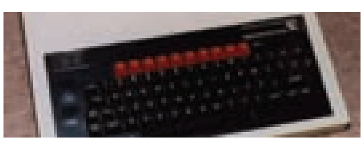
3DO

3DO GOLDSTAR	£45+ ($81+)
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)	£40+ ($74+)
PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)	£20+ ($37+)



ACORN

ARCHIMEDES	£30 ($55)
ATOM	£50 ($92)
ELECTRON	£10 ($18)
BBC MICRO	£15 ($28)



AMSTRAD

CPC 464	£10+ ($18+)
CPC 664	£90+ ($165+)
CPC 6128	£25+ ($46+)
GX4000	£50+ ($92+)

APPLE

APPLE II	£30+ ($55+)

ATARI

400/800/600XL/XE	£20+ ($37+)
2600 (VCS)	£20+ ($37+)
5200	£30 ($55)
7800	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR CD	£70 ($129)
LYNX I/II	£20+ ($37+)
ST	£20+ ($37+)

BANDAI

GUNDAM RX-78	£75+ ($138+)
PLAYDIA	£90 ($166)
PIPPIN (ATMARK)	£500+ ($921+)
WONDERSWAN	£10 ($18)
WONDERSWAN COLOR	£20 ($37)
WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL	£25 ($46)



COMMODORE

AMIGA 500/600/1200	£20+ ($37+)
C16/PLUS/4	£15+ ($28+)
C64	£10+ ($18+)
C64 GS	£30+ ($55+)
C128	£30+ ($55+)
CDTV	£20 ($37)
CD32	£25 ($46)
VIC-20	£10+ ($18+)



FUJITSU

FUJITSU FM	£100+ ($184+)
FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY	£200+ ($368+)



MISCELLANEOUS

BALLY ASTROCADE	£20 ($37)
BARCODE BATTLER	£5 ($18)
CASIO LOOPY	£25 ($46)
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F	£10 ($18)
COLECOVISION	£30 ($55)
DRAGON 32/64	£8 ($15)
ARCADIA 2001	£10 ($18)
EPOCH CASSETTE VISION	£20 ($37)
EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION	£30 ($55)
INTELLIVISION	£40+ ($74+)
ODYSSEY	£10 ($18)
ORIC-1	£20 ($37)
PLAYSTATION	£10 ($18)
SAM COUPÉ	£50-£200 ($92-$368)
SUPERVISION	£15 ($28)
TIGER ELEC GAME.COM	£15 ($28)
TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)	£10 ($18)
VECTREX (MB/GCE)	£80 ($147)
X68000	£90+ ($166+)

MSX

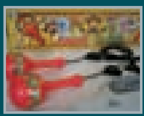
MSX 1	£10+ ($18+)
MSX 2	£20+ ($37+)
MSX 2+	£30+ ($55+)
MSX TURBO R	£30+ ($55+)

NEC

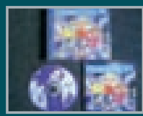
PC-6###	£10+ ($18+)

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

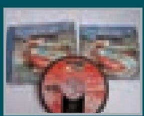
Retro Gamer sifts through the pages of eBay to report back on any items of interest, hardware, or software that caught our eyes. This month Darran shows off the Dreamcast bargains he's picked up.



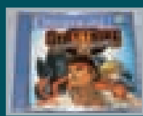
SAMBA DE AMIGO
System: **Dreamcast**
Normally sells for **£130**
Ended at **£80**



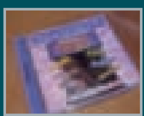
SONIC SHUFFLE
System: **Dreamcast**
Normally sells for **£27**
Ended at **£16**



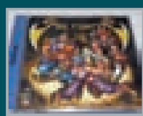
DAYTONA USA 2001
System: **Dreamcast**
Normally sells for **£28**
Ended at **£15**



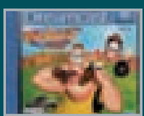
STREET FIGHTER III: THIRD STRIKE
System: **Dreamcast**
Normally sells for **£6**
Ended at **£1.34**



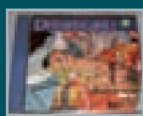
MIDWAY ARCADE CLASSICS
System: **Dreamcast**
Normally sells for **£28**
Ended at **£14**



SOUL FIGHTER
System: **Dreamcast**
Normally sells for **£8**
Ended at **£2.95**



FLOIGAN BROTHERS
System: **Dreamcast**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£2.95**



CANNON SPIKE
System: **Dreamcast**
Normally sells for **£30**
Ended at **£22**

PC-8801	**£20 ($37)**
PC-9801	**£35 ($65)**
PC-FX	**£50 ($92)**
PC-ENGINE	**£55 ($101)**
PC-ENGINE GT	**£70+ ($129+)**
TURBOGRAFX-16	**£30 ($55)**
TURBO EXPRESS	**£50 ($92)**
SUPERGRAFX	**£80 ($147)**
PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBOGRAFX CD	**£50+ ($92+)**
PC-E DUO/ TURBO DUO	**£120 ($221)**
DUO-R	**£80 ($147)**

NINTENDO

FAMICOM	**£60 ($111)**
FAMICOM AV	**£40 ($74)**
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM	**£70 ($129)**
SHARP FAMICOM TWIN	**£100 ($184)**
GAME & WATCH	**£1+ ($2+)**
GAME BOY B/W	**£5 ($9)**
GAME BOY POCKET	**£8 ($15)**
GAME BOY COLOR	**£12 ($22)**
GAME BOY ADVANCE	**£25 ($46)**
N64	**£10 ($18)**
N64 DD	**£150+ ($276+)**
NES (TOASTER)	**£15 ($28)**
NES (DOG BONE)	**£50 ($92)**
SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)	**£20 ($37)**
SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)	**£50+ ($92+)**
VIRTUAL BOY	**£80 ($147)**



PHILIPS

CD-I	**£20+ ($37+)**
CD-I 450/500	**£30 ($55)**
VIDEOPAC G7000	**£10 ($18)**
VIDEOPAC G7400	**£20 ($37)**

SEGA

32X	**£35 ($65)**
DREAMCAST	**£25 ($46)**
GAME GEAR	**£15 ($28)**
SG-1000	**£50-£150 ($80-$260)**
SC-3000	**£50 ($92)**
MASTER SYSTEM I/II	**£10 ($18)**



AMSTRAD MEGA PC	**£10 ($18)**
TERADRIVE	**£100 ($184)**
MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II	**£25 ($46)**
GENESIS 3	**£35 ($65)**
NOMAD	**£100 ($184)**
MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE	**£100+ ($184+)**
MEGA-CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**
PICO	**£20 ($37)**
SATURN	**£30 ($55)**
MEGA CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**

SINCLAIR

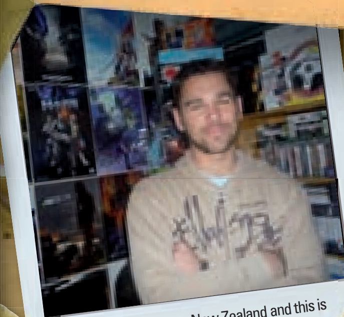
ZX80	**£200 ($368)**
ZX81	**£70 ($129)**
ZX SPECTRUM 48K	**£10 ($18)**
ZX SPECTRUM 128K	**£40 ($74)**
ZX SPECTRUM+	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +2	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +3	**£40 ($74)**

SNK

NEO-GEO AES	**£150+ ($276+)**
NEO-GEO MVS	**£70 ($129)**
NEO-GEO CD	**£100 ($184)**
NEO-GEO CDZ	**£80+ ($147+)**
NEO-GEO POCKET	**£20 ($37)**
NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR	**£35 ($65)**

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

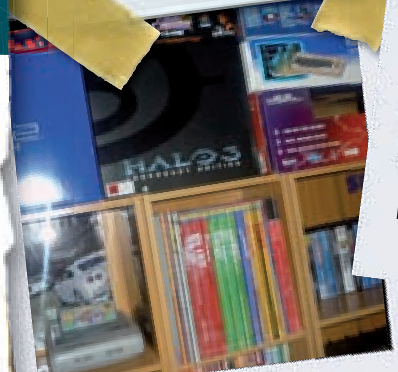
THIS MONTH WE INTRODUCE OUR FIRST COLLECTOR FROM NEW ZEALAND. HIS NAME'S **ROBERT COMER** AND HE COLLECTS FOR A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT SYSTEMS



» I'm Rob Comer from New Zealand and this is my collection. I have 500 games and have been collecting for eight years.



» Here is just a small selection of the 20 or so different consoles that I've been lucky enough to collect over the years.



» My ever-growing collection of **Retro Gamer**. Above is my favourite addition to the collection, the *Halo 3* Legendary Edition, which comes with the Master Chief helmet.



» I built this racing car to try and re-create the real thing, it was cheap and easy to build and I have the Logitech G25 wheel for added realism.



» Most of my collection is from second-hand shops and the internet. As New Zealand is such a small country it's sometimes hard to find anything worthwhile.



If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about, then contact us at **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk** and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**



» [Wii] It would appear SNK's compilation is exceedingly tough to find. Have you managed to get hold of a copy?

SHODOWN WOES

Dear Retro Gamer,
I would really like to know where I could purchase The *Samurai Shodown Anthology* for Wii and PlayStation 2. I have been unable to buy it and have tried several shops and online stores, but to no avail. In your review it stated it was 'out now', so I'd like to know what has happened to it.

Kindest regards,
G White, Essex

Are you G from *The House Of The Dead*? Basically, G, we're not entirely sure what's happened. It was definitely due for release, but appears to have been pulled for some reason. We're still waiting for an official response from Ignition, but in the meantime we have found a couple of Wii copies available for sale at www.cex.co.uk. Hope that helps, mate.

STREET FIGHTING RACCOON

Dear Retro Gamer,
I've been a long-time reader since 2004, a huge fan of Sega and Nintendo, and a proud 30-year-old Commodore user. Anyway, I wanted to know if you guys remembered a cartoon from the Eighties called *The Raccoons*? The reason I ask is that Len Carlson, who was the voice of Bert Racoon, also lends his vocal talents to Hugo and Q in *Street Fighter III: Third Strike*. I remember buying this on Dreamcast years ago, but never would have guessed it. *Third Strike* is quite often mentioned in **Retro Gamer,** so I thought you might be interested.

Many thanks,
Stephen Cross

Thanks for that nugget of information, Stephen. We certainly didn't know about it, but sadly it would appear that Len suffered a heart attack and passed away in 2006. In addition to *Street Fighter III: Third Strike* Len also lent his considerable voice talents to *The Legend Of Zelda* cartoon and *Captain N: The Games Master.*

STAR LETTER

HOW TO WIN A STAR LETTER

Dear Retro Gamer,
Please note the lengths I've gone to to win Star Letter. So, first up here's me tugging at your heart strings with a picture of my daughter Lois. Baby reading **Retro Gamer** with her proud father? Check.

I'd also like to thank you for reading my mind and covering the excellent *Wally Week* series, which was a great read for me considering *Pyjamarama* was my favourite Speccy game when growing up. Mainly because it was ridiculously quirky and I didn't know what the hell I was supposed to be doing! Paragraph dedicated to kissing **RG**'s arse? Check.

Please could some thought also be put into covering the GP2X scene, as well as focusing on the upcoming *Pandora*, which looks to be pant-wettingly exciting. I'm sure Craig Rothwell would be glad of the coverage, too. Paragraph putting forward some ideas for the team as well as supporting the homebrew scene? Check.

The only thing left on my checklist is to mention *Strider*. Double check.

Comprehensive or what? Seriously, though, I love every issue that comes through my letterbox (did I mention that I subscribe?). Keep up the good work, guys, it really is much appreciated.

Nick Lo Turco, age 30, Cardiff

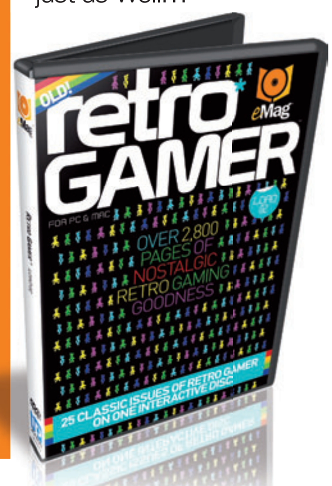


» An excellent choice for a spot of bedtime reading. Lois really is a lucky girl.

Well, you've certainly made an effort, Nick, so the least we can do is reward you for it. Enjoy the eMag we're going to send you and let us know what Lois thinks about it.

WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our brand new eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…



WHAT???

Dear Retro Gamer,
Can anybody at your magazine answer the greatest question in gaming history for me? How much wood would a woodchuck chuck, if a woodchuck could chuck wood?

Thanks,
Ed – A mighty pirate

Again. What???



» [Arcade] Hugo is Darran's favourite character in *Third Strike*. You can hear him pulling off a 360 spin a minute before it actually happens.



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Next Month: Geoff Crammond



» BURNING QUESTION?

IF YOU HAVE a burning question, such as 'will David Braben ever patch things up with Ian Bell?' or 'does Matthew Smith check into hotels as Miner Willy?' then you should head straight over to our forum to post your questions to our interviewees. The best of the bunch will be answered and revealed in the next issue. To find out who we'll be interviewing in the coming months, visit the Retro Gamer forum now at www.retrogamer.net/forum

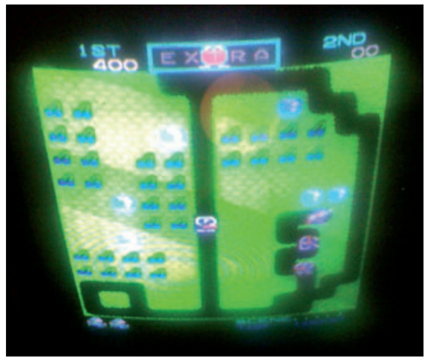
MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THESE

Dear Retro Gamer,

Like many **Retro Gamer** readers, I grew up in the Eighties and have fond memories of staying at British seaside resorts, but I'll never forget one week in particular when my family decided to stay at Whitby in North Yorkshire. Not only was this the last holiday I spent with both my parents, but it happened exactly 20 years ago this summer. So, for sentimental reasons, I decided that it would be as good an idea as any to spend my 30th birthday there, this time taking my younger, better half, Laura.

Whitby is one of those towns that really hasn't aged much apart from the fact that all of our favourite coin-ops are gone. Although this has been the norm for years, it still hurt to see the admittedly busy amusement establishments filled with little more than fruit machines. Then it happened.

While we were looking for somewhere to stay the night, we came across a pub called The Dolphin, which was advertising double rooms on the signs outside. I'd remembered The Dolphin specifically for a *Pac-Man* table that I had played on during that memorable holiday all those years ago and I proceeded to explain to Laura what a cocktail arcade cabinet actually was (can you believe that she had never actually seen one?). She wondered if it would still be there, but I was less optimistic. Heck, it was considered ancient back in the summer of 1989, and it certainly wouldn't be around now.



» It may not exactly look like much to you or me, but this *Pac-Man* machine in North Yorkshire holds some very precious memories for reader Steve Halfpenny.

Forgetting about it, I approached and asked the bar keep if they had any vacancies left, while my good lady wandered off to the little girls' room. No sooner was I informed that they did in fact have a room for us than I heard Laura yell out: "Stevie! You're not going to believe this." I quickly followed and was delighted to find that she had located the very coin-op I had just described moments earlier. It had clearly been looked after, but it had also been hacked to accommodate dodgy versions of *Galaxian*, *Arkanoid* and *1942* among others. This was more than enough to make up for the lack of games elsewhere, so obviously, a quick blast of **RG** favourite *Mr Do!* was in order and though I completely thrashed my girlfriend she did give me a run for my money on *Ms Pac-Man* (though I maintain that my joystick was a bit knackered.).

I had a great birthday weekend in Whitby, but the icing on the cake was discovering what feels like gold dust these days. Now we're thinking of investing in one ourselves (that'll be one heck of a coffee table) but the next time we're in Whitby, we'll be sure to check out the arcade table that time forgot. If any readers ever venture there, could I ask that they do the same?

Steve Halfpenny

> "I had a great time in Whitby, but the icing on the cake was discovering what feels like gold dust these days"

What an absolutely charming story, Steve. Now, Darran constantly moans about how his old holiday ground of Porthcawl, in south Wales is now filled with fruit machines and oversized grabbing machines, so your tale has certainly struck a chord with him. In fact, so moved was he by your story of discovery that he's going to award you an honorary Star Letter and send you a copy of eMag Load 2. Congratulations, mate. »

RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	Mat Corne
Joined:	18 July 2008
Location:	Stoke-On-Trent
Occupation:	Database developer
Website:	gameaddict.blog.co.uk
Fave Games System:	Arcade machines

✱ BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: SCRAMBLE

Why I picked it: Oh come on. It's a shmup and I love shmups.

Handy advice: On the comet stage, hug the ground close in order to avoid them.



High-Score: 46,320



STUART

CHOSEN GAME: KUNG-FU MASTER

Why I picked it: Having selected it to appear as next month's Classic Game it just made perfect sense.

Handy advice: Use punches over kicks because it earns you more points.



High-Score: 49,180

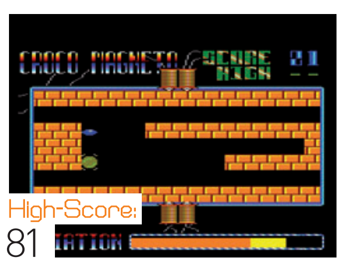


DAVID

CHOSEN GAME: CROCO MAGNETO

Why I picked it: It was a free public domain on the CPC in the early-Nineties and I still love it.

Handy advice: You must be clear where the 96 collectable blocks and magnetic nasties are.



High-Score: 81

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...

What's your favourite Ocean Software game?

ID: TMR
It's has to be *Wizball* on C64, although *Parallax* is a pretty close second place.

ID: fredghostmaster
Mr Wimpy, one of the earliest decent games for the Spectrum, great sound effects, too.

ID: sirclive1
This is probably the best forum question ever. So many choices, but I'm going to plump for *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*. I love *Track And Field*, so to get to play it at home at Christmas in 1984 was just amazing.

ID: Nreive
There are many fine games from Ocean, but the one that stands out is *Chase HQ* on Amstrad CPC. Being a huge fan of the arcade, I was overjoyed to see such a quality conversion appear on the humble 8-bit Amstrad CPC.

ID: yethboth
The Ocean release of *Pang* on the Spectrum has to be the best Spectrum conversions I've ever played. A fantastic game and a decent conversion.

ID: Chinnico
For my choice, after a hard interior fight about *Head Over Heels* and *Wizball*, I'll pick the isometric puzzler: *Head Over Heels* on C64.

ID: joey
Platoon on C64. It was the first tape I ever loaded on my 64 when I got it for my sixth birthday and I remember having a great time but having no idea what I was doing.

ID: firebreather
Robocop: one of the few film tie-ins I've enjoyed.

ID: richyrich
I know I'm going to get shot down for this, but *Combat School* on C64. Can still hum that awful tune and the pre-teen exercise my wrist got was much appreciated in later years. Could never complete the bloody thing though.

ID: mrspud
So many great games, but it has to be *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* on ZX Spectrum. The first Ocean game I played and the first game to knacker my joystick. You owe me for that, Ocean!

ID: avant
Robocop 3 on Amiga. I loved the driving and corridor shooting parts, like an early *GTA III*. The film was a real let down after playing the game. Also spent many hours playing *Robocop* on Spectrum, which was hard as nails, but I loved the action. The Amiga conversion was nice, too.

ID: HalcyonDaze00
Not easy as they published some great games. After considering *Rainbow Islands*, *Operation Thunderbolt*, *New Zealand Story* and *F29 Retaliator*, I've decided to ignore them all (even though they are all great) and opt for *Wizball*, which is quite simply one the best, most originally brilliant games ever made.

ID: Groo_the Wanderer
My favourite has to be *Match Day 2*. I also loved the Ocean stand at computer shows – they were huge and gave out free pens. I like free pens.

ID: Miniman
Definitely *Robocop* on the Speccy 128K. Sampled speech, the moodiest title music in history (still gives me goosey-bumps) and just a great game to look at and play.

ID: uglifruit
The best Ocean purchase I made was The Magnificent Seven compilation of eight games. It was difficult to complain about their adding up when you went home clutching a box containing *Wizball*, *Head Over Heels*, *Arkanoid*, *Cobra*, *Frankie Goes To Hollywood*, *The Great Escape*, *Short Circuit* and *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*. Bargain-flavoured class.

ID: lavalyte
I would have said the C64 *Wizball*, except that Ocean also got Andrew Braybrook to do the Amiga *Rainbow Islands*. So I can't choose.

ID: JetSetWilly
Not technically an Ocean game, but it has to be their conversion of *Chase HQ* for the humble Speccy. It was technically impossible to produce what they did for the system with that game, but somehow they did it. And it had speech in it, so it gets a plus-one from me on that.

ID: yakmag
On the miggy it has to be *Batman*, like other comments posted earlier it has to be the greatest movie tie-in that Ocean Software ever produced, the driving/flying sections are pure class.

ID: stulec52
I'm going to say *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, but if you ask me, Ocean Software missed a trick. They should have made joysticks, too, they would have made a lot more cash

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

EXPENSIVE GAMES

Ferret Oxide I was looking on eBay at a copy of *Battlesphere* for the Jaguar. With three days to go it is already at £80. It got me wondering, what makes games like this so expensive in the first place.

Will2097 *Battlesphere* is apparently above average. If that goes for less than £250 I will be surprised (and the happy owner).

Cannibal Bob I guess the final price comes down to three things: the first two are how many people want it and how many units are available. Good old-fashioned supply and demand. The third thing – and in my opinion this is the most important part – is what people perceive to be its value. It is completely irrelevant how many people want something and how few units there are available, if nobody is willing to pay much for it then it isn't worth much.

MEGADRIVER

Slayer6000 I was watching some YouTube vids of old games, and I came across Megadriver. I checked out the website and was impressed. I don't know if any of you have heard of them, but they're a band that does metal covers of Mega Drive game soundtracks on guitars made of old consoles.

Sureshot I think most probably have. I prefer Game Over/Powerglove, personally.

Team Alfie Chiptune renditions of rock songs are the way to go, not the other way around.

takesages Meh… there's so little skill involved in doing this, and metalling up everything makes the songs lose all their original charm. I'd rather listen the original music.

FlyHighKid Not bad at all IMO. I do prefer the original songs waaay more though. I can't imagine anyone who wouldn't. Well I can, but hey…

MARVEL VS CAPCOM 2

ShadowMan Well, after numerous problems with my internet connection, I finally got to play this online. It's everything I hoped it would be. Zero lag, lightning fast and really fun to play. Well worth the points for me since I wanted a good online-enabled *MVC2* and that's exactly what I got.

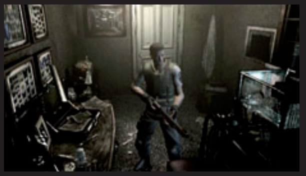
scunny Loving it as much as I did on Xbox. Definitely up for **RG** tourney. Mostly only play with Marvel characters

Sureshot I picked it up yesterday, but as happened when I first played it on DC, I still don't like it as much as *MSH Vs SF*. I can't pinpoint exactly what it is, but I always felt like it lost something in comparison.

Old VS NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *Resident Evil* is your favourite?

Resident Evil (PSone)



Resident Evil 5



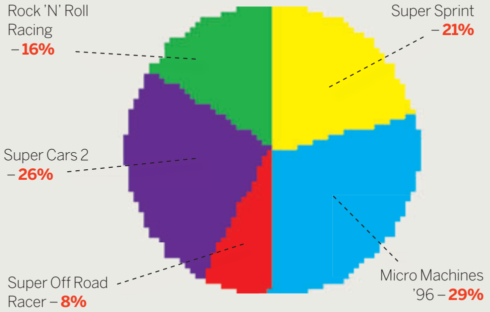
93% | 7%

Resident Evil
I thought *Resident Evil* was a pretty scary yet challenging game – yethboth

Resident Evil 5
I voted for *5* because it feels easier to control, but everyone else is choosing *1* – Dave300

HOT TOPIC

What's your favourite top-down racing game?



"As I've been playing *Super Cars* (original) on the 128K, it has to be *Super Cars 2*. Easy to pick up and play, but still takes a bit of mastering. Addictive" **– McBoosh**

"*Super Sprint*, the first 16-bit game I ever played. Three of us huddled around an ST (two on joysticks, me on keys) it was like the arcades had come home" **– StickHead**

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FAMICOM HELP NEEDED

Hello Darran,

I am a big fan of your magazine and I was wondering if you or somebody you know could help me out with a question I have.

I love retro games, but I don't know anything about how to make older systems work. I have been living in Tokyo for a while now and brought back a Famicom (at the expense of other useful items such as my clothes and leaving gifts from friends). Anyway, the Famicom is all well and good, but it doesn't work now that I'm back in the UK. I went to Maplin and was told a load of rubbish about what to do to make it work. I wondered if you knew of anyone who could help me to get it up and running instead?

Second, Tokyo was ace. Have you ever heard of a retro computer shop called Super Potato there? I would recommend running an article on it if you haven't already, because it was so awesome I never wanted to leave it.

Anyway, if you could help me I'd be eternally grateful, as I really, really, really, want to play on my Famicom!

Cheers

Jenny Cox

Well, Jenny, provided you haven't already plugged this into the UK mains and blown your machine, it's just a simple case of picking up a step-down converter that will be able to handle the different voltage on which the Famicom runs. Maplin is just the place you need to go, or you could hunt around online for the best price. You should be able to get one for around the £20 mark. Expensive, but let's face it, you can't put a price on Famicom love.

OVERPRICED ATLANTIS

Dear Retro Gamer,

Why, in your latest magazine, have you encouraged people to fork out for *Indiana Jones And The Staff Of Kings* on the Wii just to get *Fate Of Atlantis*? All they need to do is download it via Steam and pay £2.99 instead and experience it on the best point-and-click platform. Having said that, surely the comeback of the point-and-click adventure needs covering better in the magazine? Your recent article with *Broken Sword* and so on did much, but surely the popularity of the Indy fan games (**http://www.barnettcollege.com** for example, which didn't even get a mention) shows that it's never really been away it's just publishers like LucasArts realising that there's a cash cow out there.

Also, Videogame Nation at Urbis… *Jet Set Willy* available on a PC Digital Gamepad? Hardly any actual hardware? Having to pay to use arcade machines? No ZX80/81/QL/Dragon32 etc? How could something so promising be so badly implemented?

Regards, Mark James Hardisty

To be fair, Mark, *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis* wasn't actually available on Steam when the magazine went to print, so we couldn't really recommend it to readers. Of course, it's a completely different story now, so if you want to save some money, go for the Steam version because it's awesome.



» [DOS] ***Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*** **is now available on Steam for just £2.99.**

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

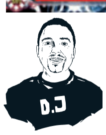
YouTube

Darran has many obsessions in life and his latest is the channel he's set up at http://www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz. Every day he's been boring Stuart and Steve with his latest video shenanigans and telling anyone and everyone in the office about the number of subscribers he currently has. No one cares except him.

> "I recommend Tokyo's retro computer shop Retro Potato"

CURRENTLY PLAYING

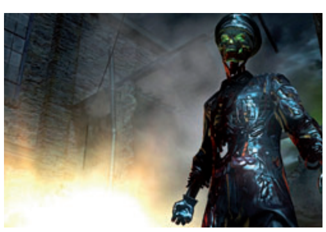




DARRAN

BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger

Gorgeous 2D fighter from the creator of *Guilty Gear*, featuring amazing backdrops, solid online play, incredible animation and a selection of crazy characters. Essential if you love your beat-'em-ups. The PS3 version is region free.

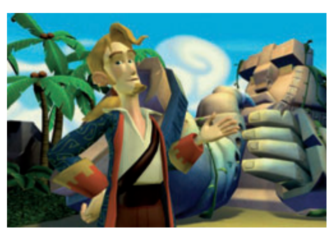




STUART

Wolfenstein

While not quite matching the majesty of *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, the latest *Wolfenstein* game by Raven is actually rather fun. I've only pumped a few hours into it, so it's still early days. Expect a full report next issue.





DAVID

Tales Of Monkey Island: Part 1

I'd never let *Tales Of Monkey Island* sail away. With Dave Grossman at the helm and voice actor Dominic Armato again delivering perfect lines, it's lived up to expectation. Sure, it's short, but it's full of laughs. And a cinch, it ain't.

retro GAMER

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JAMES HALEY

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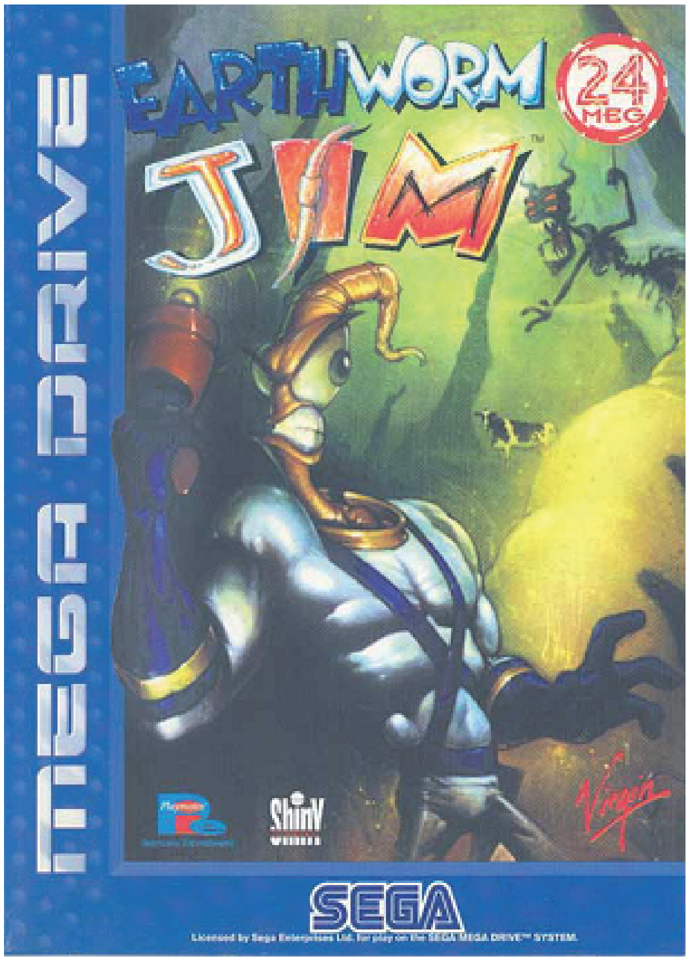
CLONE WARS

With a new game now officially confirmed, we speak to the creators of the original Syndicate

OTHER EXCITING FEATURES

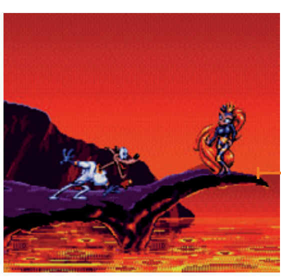
- We chart the odyssey of *Final Fantasy* and reveal how it went from potential company-breaker to one of the world's most enduring RPGs.
- Famed for his intricate attention to detail and love of motor racing, we finally manage to corner the ever-reclusive Geoff Crammond.
- Speccy coder Keith Burkhill comes out of hiding to explain how he converted Sega's *Space Harrier* to the humble ZX Spectrum.

END/GAME

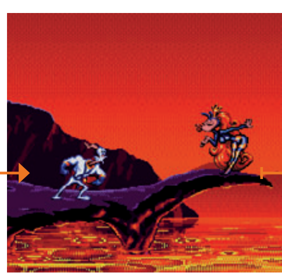


EARTHWORM JIM

Given that surreal humour is rife throughout Earthworm Jim, it's no surprise the game ends on a pretty unusual note. Take one earthworm wearing a power-giving spacesuit, one pretty young princess who's related to an ugly puss-filled slug and add one demented looking cow. The marriage of this random trio can be seen below



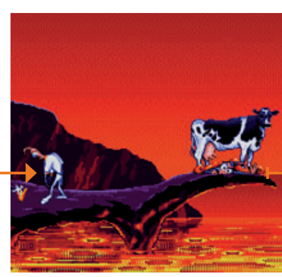
SCREEN 1
Jim rescues his damsel in distress, and upon seeing her slight figure, squirrel-tale mane of red hair, and Angelina Jolie mouthpiece, he transforms into a wolf.



SCREEN 2
A love-struck Jim can't believe his luck when the princess repays his advances – which probably came across as desperate and sleazy – with a kiss.



SCREEN 3
But the course of true love never runs smoothly. As our lovers prepare to lock lips, a cow with dead eyes and the face of insanity lands on the princess.



SCREEN 4
As her lifeless body lies beneath the weight of nature's lawn-mowing milk producer, a devastated Jim makes his way out of shot. A broken man…



SCREEN 5
…until he spies something: the maiden's crown. He swipes it. Now all we need is for the weight of that cow to break the ledge and plop her body into the lava. Oh.